

SHE WAS BOTH LITHE AND LUSH . . .

a very interesting combination, clearly visible because she was covered only by one corner of the sheet.

Her dark, tousled hair looked as though it had been disarranged by a high wind. This was a deliberate effect, produced with care.

And everything else about her was deliberate, even the desire that flashed from her jet black eyes: She was a woman who wanted something—as much as she could get—

She raised her arms and stretched, her body moving underneath his hand.

It was easy to see why a man would be willing to kill for her. It was easier to see why she would let him.

MURDER TAKES

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Target: Mike Shayne

Blood on Biscayne Bay

BRETT
HALLIDAY

NO HOLIDAY

A DELL MYSTERY

To Helen Clarkson

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or two, with some trouble which naturally she'd be too embarrassed to take to the police. No other private detective could help her. She'd bat her eyes and take a few deep breaths, and you'd be back in action again, broken ribs and all.—Don't look at me like that. You know what I mean. Dr. Sanborn would never have let you out of the hospital if you hadn't promised to have a real rest, and I'm going to see that you keep your promise if it kills both of us."

Shayne was grinning. "How do you know there aren't any cute blondes with problems where I'm going?"

"They won't know who you are, thank goodness. They can take their problems to somebody who hasn't just got out of a hospital. And you'd better not encourage them, either!"

"That might be easier if you were somewhere on the same island, angel," Shayne said lightly.

She colored and looked away. "It seems to me we've been over that, too. But I don't mind saying it again if you didn't hear me any of the other times. I have something to think about, and I think more clearly, for some reason, when you're a few hundred miles away. Well."

She finished her drink and said briskly, "We don't want to keep the chain gang waiting, do we?"

Shayne laughed. He drank off his cognac, and took a sip of ice-water, after which he stood up. Taking Lucy's arm, he steered her toward the door. It burst open and a tall, loose-jointed, untidy man, his hat on the back of his head, pushed in. It was Tim Rourke, a reporter on the *Miami News*, Michael Shayne's oldest friend in Miami.

"Hey, Mike," he said. "They're calling your plane, did you know that? I didn't think I was going to get here in time. Go ahead—I want to grab a fast shot. You're looking nice, baby," he added to Lucy. "Nice dress."

"Thank you, Tim," she said, smiling.

The bar-man served him promptly, and Rourke overtook Lucy and the rangy redhaired private detective in the lobby.

"You know what I did, Mike? I forgot to bring you a going-away present. That would never do. The other passengers would think you aren't popular."

He veered off abruptly and headed for a news-stand. Shayne and his secretary watched, amused, while the disheveled reporter made a swift series of purchases. He returned in a moment with an armload of paperbound books and a huge box of chocolates.

"Tim, you idiot," Lucy said fondly. "Michael doesn't like candy."

"Then the candy's for you," Rourke said, putting the box into her arms. "Don't read all these, Mike. Take your pick and leave the rest for the stewardess. There's quite a cool bunch of chicks on this line—but of course an invalid like you wouldn't be interested."

He faked a punch at the redhead's ribs, four of which had been fractured as a result of a fight in a speeding car that was being driven by a heroin wholesaler named Sal Rubio. The car had gone over an embankment. The hoodlum had been killed.

"Tim!" Lucy cried in alarm.

"Don't worry, honey," Rourke told her. "It wouldn't give me any satisfaction to beat up on Mike, in his present condition. He's too puny. Get your strength back, Mike, and I'll carry you for a few fast rounds. Gate Five," he said, looking up. "I do believe that's us. Now don't do anything too strenuous, pal. A little brainwork won't hurt you, but no rough-housing. Remember what the doctor told you."

He gave Shayne a large wink. Lucy demanded, "Just what do you mean by that, Tim?"

"Not a thing," Rourke said innocently. "But I've known this character longer than you have. Wherever

he goes, for some strange reason things seem to happen. And the big son of a—" He caught himself. "Excuse me. The big baboon usually comes out with a nice piece of change. What I wanted to say, Mike," he said more seriously, "is you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. When I steer something somebody's way, I expect first crack at it for the *News*. Do you get my point?"

"Hell, no," Shayne said easily, "and if I didn't know you so well, I'd say you'd been drinking."

"Never touch the stuff."

Lucy studied Tim suspiciously for another moment, and turned to Shayne.

"Don't look at *me*," the detective said. "I don't know what the hell he's talking about, if he's talking about anything."

"Well, I only hope I don't live to regret this." Coming up on her toes, she gave him a glancing kiss on the cheek. "Send me a postcard every day, Michael."

He put an arm around her shoulders and gave her a rough hug, feeling a stab of pain in his rib-cage. "Good-by, Miss Hamilton. This is going to be a long three weeks."

He turned quickly. Passing through the gate with long, purposeful strides, he followed the red carpet to the big bird that was waiting for him on the hardtop. Lucy and Tim Rourke climbed to the observation deck to watch the take-off. The stewardess—and Shayne noted with amusement that she was as trim and attractive as Rourke had predicted—consulted her clipboard. She made a check beside his name and led him down the aisle. Halfway to the end she stopped, puzzled, and looked at her board again. The seat assigned to Michael Shayne was taken.

"May I see your reservation, sir?" she asked politely.

A rumped, heavily built man, holding a dispatch case

on his lap, looked up, and Shayne recognized Jack Malloy, the customs agent-in-charge, a former Miami cop.

Malloy heaved himself up. "You just about got in under the wire, Mike. I was beginning to think that Tim Rourke was wrong."

"What about Tim?" Shayne said.

"I ran into him this afternoon, and he told me you were taking this plane."

The stewardess cleared her throat unhappily. "I'm afraid there's been a mistake. I must ask to see your ticket, sir."

"I'm not going with you, dear," Malloy said, "so relax. I cleared it with the boys up front. But for God's sake don't let them take off with me aboard. It's just the sort of thing that captain of yours would think is funny."

She looked doubtful, but tucked the clipboard under her arm and let him squeeze past.

"Come on back here, Mike," Malloy said. "Something I want to ask you."

Shayne exchanged a look with the stewardess and shrugged. He tossed the books Rourke had given him onto the vacant seat and followed Malloy back to the narrow galley. The customs agent let him go in first. He remained in the doorway himself, turned sideways so he could watch the passengers.

"This isn't the way I like to work," he said. "It's pretty public. But it seemed like too good a chance to pass up. I've been trying to track you down all afternoon."

"Miss Hamilton took me shopping," the redhead said with disgust. "You can't go to the Caribbean these days, it seems, without getting dolled up like a damn fool."

"Sorry I didn't get around to the hospital, Mike. How are you feeling? You look all right to me."

"I'm fine," Shayne said curtly. "But what's it all about, Jack? Unless you want to go for a plane ride you'd better get to the point."

Malloy looked at his watch. "They'll wait for me. I hope. I brought you a present, to put you in the mood."

He took a flat pint bottle of cognac out of his side pocket.

"Rourke gave me a box of candy," the redhead said. "This is a big improvement."

"I thought you'd appreciate it. We'll have to drink it straight, but as I remember that's the way you like it."

He broke the seal with his thumb-nail and got glasses down from a shelf over the stainless-steel sink. He splashed a good double-jigger into each glass and pushed one toward Shayne. Then he returned to the doorway.

"Tim tells me you're supposed to take it easy, so I know I have to do some persuading. To get the sordid matter of money out of the way first, if all goes well it could pay the full fifty thousand."

Shayne looked at him sharply. "Wait a minute, Jack. You wouldn't be holding up a plane with fifty people aboard unless you had something your own people aren't equipped to handle, and ordinarily I'd be glad to hear about it. I know you pay informers twenty-five percent of seizures, to a top of fifty grand. People have weird ideas about the size of my income, but as a matter of fact I don't get that kind of fee very often. I can't help you, though, Jack. When they let me out of that hospital they put me on good behavior. I promised various people, including my secretary, that I wouldn't do any work for three weeks."

"They don't need to know about it," Malloy said, unruffled. "If it was only a matter of the fifty thousand I wouldn't take up any of your time. In your bracket,

what's a mere fifty thousand? My fellow-workers in Internal Revenue will get most of it."

"Knock it off," Shayne growled. "I just want you to know how things stand. Thanks for the cognac. Unless you want to change your mind and take it back?"

"Damn it, Mike. Don't be such a hard-nose. I'm going to tell you about this if it takes all night. Why not shut up and listen so they can get this plane in the air?"

Shayne looked at him, his ragged red brows close together. After a second he shrugged and lifted the cognac.

"Go ahead. So long as you realize you're wasting your breath."

"All right," Malloy said. "Three or four weeks ago an Englishman named Albert Watts came into my office. A mild little guy in his late thirties. Very nervous and jumpy. He looked as though he might have served a hitch in the British army and never got over it. A jet came over and the sonic boom almost gave him heart failure. He'd heard about our informer fees, and he wanted to know two things—how much of a tip he'd have to turn in to get the top price, and would he have to appear in court to give evidence? Well, we don't use our pigeons in court because a smuggler has to be caught with the goods on him, or there isn't any case. Watts seemed glad to hear it. He wouldn't say anything more, except that I'd be hearing from him. I put a man on him, who tailed him back to his hotel. He was only in town for two days. He'd come up from St. Albans on business."

"St. Albans," Shayne said sarcastically. "The same place I'm going. Big surprise."

"Come on, Mike. Sure it's the same place. Otherwise why would I be here? We didn't have any trouble finding out that he was assistant manager of the St. Albans branch of an American travel agency. He didn't have

much to do in Miami. The trip was mainly a pretext to see me. He went sightseeing, saw a few movies, and then went home. He didn't have one drink while he was here. About two weeks later a cable came in from St. Albans, signed Albert. All it gave was a ship, an arrival time, and a man's name—Paul Slater. Does that ring any bell with you, Mike?"

Shayne revolved his glass of cognac thoughtfully. "Paul Slater. I don't think so. I suppose you shook him down when he came in. What did you find—nothing?"

"Not exactly. We found fifty Swiss watch movements inside the lining of a suitcase. If he got a good break on the resale, he stood to make the magnificent sum of four hundred dollars. Naturally I was disgusted with the nervous Mr. Watts. All this build up and hugger-mugger for a hundred buck fee, maybe less. Well, stranger things have happened. We confiscated the watch movements and gave Mr. Slater the treatment: a formal indictment, maximum fine and a stern lecture from the judge. This is usually enough to make a petty smuggler think twice before he does it again. It seemed to work with Slater. He looked like a beaten dog. After the trial, Watts should have contacted me to collect his fee. But there wasn't any word from him at all. That sometimes happens, too, and ordinarily I'd forget about it. But something about this was nagging at me. I couldn't really believe that the Albert Watts who'd been in my office had only expected to clear a hundred bucks. And I was there when Slater was searched. He was nervous, but we have that effect even on honest people. He didn't overplay it or underplay it. It was just about right. But you need second-sight to be a good customs agent, and there was something wrong about the guy, Mike. I felt it and the men felt it, and it wasn't just those fifty watch movements. So I sent a message through channels. I was careful about it, because St. Albans is British, after all.

There's an old tradition of smuggling in the area, and they're more tolerant of it than I tend to be. The message was simple. I asked Watts to come in and see me the next time he was in Miami. He never got it. Last Wednesday, two or three days after Slater got back to St. Albans, Watts was found knifed in the native quarter of the Old Town."

Shayne shook out a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth. He offered the pack to Malloy, who shook his head.

"All right," Shayne said. "I can hardly keep from crying. You don't think it was anything simple, like a fight or a robbery. You think it ties in with the tip he gave you on Slater. And people don't get murdered because of a few watch movements."

"Exactly. And so it occurred to me. What if you're a courier like Slater? You work out a pretty good method of getting the stuff in. But you have to buy it from somebody, and there's always a danger of leakage. Why wouldn't it be a smart idea to carry a decoy, a second parcel of contraband, only worth a few C's? Then if somebody turns in a tip, the poor dumb customs agents find the decoy parcel and write the informer off as a harmless crackpot. The real contraband goes through untouched. No further investigation. No tail on the guy. Clever?"

Shayne swallowed the cognac he had been rolling around in his mouth, and reached for the bottle. Against his will, he was becoming interested.

"Why wouldn't it be even better if you didn't find anything?" he asked. "If the real stuff is going through some other way, he's in the clear. He can act indignant and make you feel like a heel."

"If we had a good solid tip on him, Mike," Malloy said grimly, "we'd put him under the microscope. We'd get him up in the morning and put him to bed at night."

We'd dog him around every minute he was in this country, and if he tried to take delivery on an illegal shipment, we'd grab him. This way, he paid a small fine to get us to forget about him."

"Is there anything to indicate that, or is it just a hunch?"

"So far just a hunch," Malloy admitted. "We have as many hunches as lady horse-players, only they don't lose us any money if we're wrong. This time the hunch is that those watch movements have been traveling back and forth a long time. The more I think about it, the stronger it gets. I've had two men digging up background on Slater, and they've put together quite a dossier. He's perfect for the part. He runs a little import business in gift and novelty items in St. Albans. He travels a lot around the Caribbean, picking up local junk, most of it native-made, that he sells to gift shops. Baskets, costume jewelry, that kind of stuff. He comes through Miami once a month or once every two months. He doesn't make a hell of a lot of money. And he's careful. His standard of living is about right for his legal income. A good reputation with his jobbers. Not very aggressive or high-powered, but people seem to like him. No sign of anything offbeat in his private life."

"Very logical," Shayne commented skeptically. "You didn't find anything, so that proves he's a crook."

"The watch movements, Mike," Malloy reminded him. "He was out of line there."

"I suppose you've checked his shipments?"

"Sure. We're putting everything through the scope. Nothing's turned up so far."

"More and more suspicious," Shayne said.

"Mike, you're going to get me sore in a minute. We gave him a scare. Naturally he'll be extra careful for a while."

"It's still your problem, not mine," Shayne said. "If

he slipped something past you, I can see how you feel. But it's too late to do anything about it now. And what makes you think he'll do it again. In other words, where do the fifty thousand bucks come in?"

"Sometimes when they think of a new angle they give it a dry run, to see if it works, and make the real push the next trip. But I told you the money's not the big thing here. As it happens, Slater's been married six years, happily, as far as anybody knows. Do you remember Fred Baines, Mike? Remember he had a wife?"

The lines on the redhead's face were deeply etched. He nodded slowly. "That's why the name sounded so familiar."

"I was in Fred's division when I was on the force," Malloy went on. "I saw quite a bit of them at one time. When Fred got plugged, Martha must have been all of twenty or twenty-one. She and Fred didn't have any kids. You couldn't expect her to stay a widow the rest of her life, and she married Paul Slater a couple of years later. The name didn't click with me until I was going through Slater's file and came to his wife's name. I remember you worked on that case. Does that change things at all?"

Shayne was looking at him thoughtfully, and Malloy went on, "We've got time for another drink."

Shayne watched him pour the cognac. He had been with Martha Baines that long-ago afternoon when four cops—tongue-tied and miserable, but doing what they had to do—had brought her husband's body home. She had seemed very young to Shayne then, too young to have such a thing happen to her. Under Shayne's eyes in the days that followed, the scared kid had turned into a mature, tragic-faced woman. Her husband, a plain-clothes detective, had been shot by a thief he had surprised in the act of robbing a jewelers' exchange. Shayne, on contingency fee from an insurance company, had

brought in the killer and recovered most of the stolen jewelry. The murderer's death sentence had been commuted, largely on the strength of a plea for clemency made by the young widow.

During the trial and afterward, Shayne had come to feel a deep admiration for Martha Baines. He had seen the color return to her cheeks, and on one occasion he still remembered clearly—he had taken her to an *jai-alai frontón*—he had watched her eyes light up with excitement for the first time since her husband's death. Not long after that, he had met Lucy Hamilton, and from then on no other woman could mean anything to him.

He picked up his glass and took a long swallow. "You really think Slater's mixed up in something important?"

"Yes," Malloy said quietly. "I'm sure as it's possible to be without absolute proof. Maybe Watts was actually killed in a barroom brawl, but is it likely, Mike? And there's one other point I haven't mentioned. I've had a number of little tips that stuff is coming into St. Albans for re-shipment to the States."

Shayne tugged at one earlobe. "If you're right, if Slater got by with something this last time, he'll try it again. Sooner or later you'll catch him and put him in jail, and that'll be hell on Martha. All right, I'll talk to her. It'll be a painful conversation, God knows; but she can probably convince him—"

Malloy put in quickly, "I wish you wouldn't, Mike. Of course I can't stop you. That's one of the risks I'm running by putting my cards on the table. What if she does persuade him to quit? They'll get themselves another boy. If the gimmick still works and the new courier makes money, Slater will be sore that he let her talk him out of it. The next time he gets an offer he'll take it, and he'll be back on the merry-go-round. Let's put the main people out of business, Mike. Then he won't be tempted. I've been looking for a chance like this. We

pick up the couriers now and then, and our seizures just about cover expenses. We never touch the higher-ups. We don't even hurt them financially. There's a bunch of ethical businessmen in Amsterdam who write insurance covering smuggling losses."

A fair young man in pilot's uniform came down the aisle. "Can't hold her much longer, Jack. The control tower's getting salty."

"Just going," Malloy said. "This is Mike Shayne, Captain Connors."

"Hello, Mr. Shayne," the pilot said, shaking hands. "I've heard about you."

"Can you stall for two minutes more?" Shayne said. "We'd appreciate it."

"Sure. But that's about all."

When the pilot left, Shayne said angrily, "I don't know a soul on the island. I don't know the ground rules. I'm only hitting on three cylinders, and if somebody gives me a gentle nudge in the ribs, I go back to the hospital for another few weeks. And how about this program you've laid out for me? All you want me to do is break up a smuggling ring, solve a murder, keep Slater out of trouble unless he happens to turn out to be the murderer, and at the same time see to it that the next shipment, whatever it is, goes through with another courier so you'll get credit for a seizure and I'll get a fee. They'll be in a hurry now, so how much time do I have for all this? A couple of days?"

Malloy grinned. "I had an idea you'd do it."

"Don't expect any miracles, that's all," Shayne said, still angry.

"Well, I've seen you pull some surprising rabbits out of hats in your time, Mike. There's only one lead I can give you, and frankly it's not too hot. I'm told that some of the high-duty stuff coming into St. Albans from Europe ends up with a character named Luis Al-

varez, also known as the Camel. A Venezuelan. He runs a tourist trap called The Pirate's Rendezvous."

"Any connection with Slater?"

"Not as far as I know."

"Wait a minute," Shayne said as Malloy turned. He worried at his earlobe for a moment longer and said, "This may not work, but I'm going to need something. Get a flier printed up. 'Wanted for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution'—one of those. You can pick up a picture of me in one of the newspaper morgues. Not the *News*, because I don't want Tim Rourke to know about this. Print up a half dozen with my description and some nice interesting crime and rush them down to the St. Albans cops on tomorrow afternoon's plane. Special delivery. Urgent. You have information that this man has left the country, heading for the Caribbean."

Malloy thought about it. "I don't like it, Mike. Officially I have to keep on good terms with all the departments in the area."

"Then don't sign it with your own name," Shayne said impatiently. "Use a mimeographed sheet. To all police chiefs in the Caribbean. From Joe Doakes, Miami office, FBI. Hell, do I have to draft it for you? If you really don't like the idea, think of a better one."

"I can't on the spur of the moment," Malloy admitted. "What name do you want on the picture?"

Shayne sighed. "Michael Shayne, I guess. Too many complications, otherwise. I hope Miss Hamilton doesn't hear about it."

"Well, you're the one who'll be taking the chances, Mike. Good luck."

He put out his hand. The stewardess was signaling frantically with her clipboard. He called, "Coming."

They shook hands briefly. As Shayne watched Malloy go up the aisle, his eyes were bleak. He turned abruptly and reached for the cognac.

CHAPTER 2

Paul Slater scrubbed his hand through his fair hair. It was the color of driftwood, cropped very close. He wore only a pair of walking shorts. He was built like an athlete, and his movements were quick and graceful. He was beautifully tanned.

He ground out a cigarette viciously and looked at the girl lying on the bed, propped on one elbow. She was dark, with tousled black hair that looked as though it had been disarranged by a high wind. This was a deliberate effect, produced with care. She was both lithe and lush, an interesting combination which was readily apparent, as she was covered only by one corner of the sheet. That was where it was not because of modesty, but simply because that was where it had ended up.

She blinked up at Slater lazily. "But what was it like?"

"You don't know, Vivienne," he said with feeling. "You just don't know. I've never been through anything remotely like it. The physical search—it was thorough and professional and humiliating, of course. Never mind. That I could stand. It was their attitude. I was dirt under their feet."

"But you fool them, eh?" the girl said indifferently, speaking with a strong French accent.

"Oh, yes," Slater said gloomily. "It worked like a charm. There's no doubt about it, I'm a genius. But the one thing that I didn't expect was the way I *felt*. At first they were polite and respectful. Not really *polite*, but they treated me as one professional to another. It was my job to fool them, it was their job not to be fooled. Then

they found those miserable watch movements. I've been hauling them around in my suitcase ever since the duty went up, just waiting for this moment. Positively brilliant. And all at once I became ludicrous. Fifty watch movements! I wasn't a professional after all, I was a bungling, half-witted amateur. After that they treated me with contempt. Naturally the judge couldn't let me go without a tongue lashing. He did a good job of it, too. I was wriggling like a schoolboy."

"If it had been me," the girl said, "I would have been laughing at them inside the whole time."

"That's the way I always thought I'd feel," he said, puzzled. He lit a fresh cigarette and breathed smoke out slowly. "But when you come to the point, all of a sudden it dawns on you—sure, they may be fools, but they also have the power to put you in prison for a long, long time. When you're standing up in front of a judge who doesn't think much of you, it isn't quite so amusing. I walked out of the courthouse, and I should have been feeling fine. Everybody said their lines exactly the way they were supposed to. But what if they hadn't? What if some eager type had wondered if I was as dumb as I looked, and really started dogging me around?" A slight shudder passed over his handsome body. "It makes me cold to think about it. The odds were about fifty to one. That's a very good bet. But even fifty-to-one shots sometimes come in. It's been known to happen."

He stared at the glowing tip of the cigarette. He sat down on the edge of the bed beside her and dropped one hand lightly onto her hip.

"Anyway," he said, "that's the last time I go through anything like *that*. I'm resigning, as of now. That's what I've been leading up to. I want you to know how I feel about it."

Her eyes glinted for a moment. Then her lids came down and hid the shrewd look that had appeared in

them briefly. She raised her arms and stretched, her body moving underneath his hand.

"Of course you must stop if you feel that way, cheri. It is not too serious. There are other ways of getting money."

"Name three," Slater said grimly. "I don't see myself selling enough baskets to gift shops to put me up with Rockefeller. No, I can't quite picture it. God knows there's money around. Look at these damned tourists. Where they get it, I don't know. None of it seems to stick to me."

"Then I'll tell you what I think," she said. "I think we must bid each other good-by. Not at this precise minute! No, in a little while. I am without money or family, with my way to make in the world. Poor Paul, I am such a terrible extravagance for you. So say good-by to me like a good friend. It will be simple."

"Simple!" He said.

"But of course. You must cut down on expenses. You have me, you have your wife. Everything double. I am not asking you to divorce her. Absolutely not. That is altogether your affair."

Slater breathed out heavily.

"I am ashamed, you know," she said. "Not about our love, that is a very beautiful thing. But because of me, you must do something you dislike. You are unhappy. I say it will be simple, but not easy. It will be hard. For me as well. But I am very, very bad for you, Paul. I will leave your life, then again you can be happy in the old way, no more of this silly business of taking things to America against the law."

"God, Vivienne," he protested.

She moved restlessly. "I like you more than any man I have ever known. You make me feel—so—" She stopped. "I cannot say it in this stiff and awkward language, English. But you know it. You know it well. What am I

to do? My other American friend says he can find a way to take me to your country, where I so much long to be. I am tired of these hot, horrible little towns. I want to see New York! The cars, the beautiful clothes, the tall buildings. To be looked at, admired. I am stifling here."

She came up on both elbows and said quickly, "I know how you feel. But listen to me, Paul. You said the next time would be really big. I mean, you would make more than ever before. And after that, *then* you could stop, and we could still—" The light in her face faded and she lay back. "No, it is impossible. There is always that one chance in fifty, and it would be horrible if—"

"Ten years in jail," he said. "God, I just don't know. Maybe—"

She smiled suddenly and reached out for him with both arms. "Let us forget about money and such things. We are together. Who knows? If it is the last time, we will always regret wasting it in talking."

"It won't be the last," he said fiercely.

She moistened her lips, and a sort of veil fell over her eyes. "You are also wasting time smoking a cigarette. You can smoke cigarettes by the carton after your wife returns. Paul, my darling."

A sound escaped him, almost a groan. He waited while her eyes closed and her tongue moved impatiently across her lips. She was snapping her fingers silently, as she did when she was hunting for an English word.

Putting his burning cigarette deliberately on the edge of the bedside table, he came down to her. The cigarette continued to smolder, leaving a scar on the varnish, overlapping other burn-marks left by other careless guests of the hotel. Soon there was nothing left but ash. The breeze from the open window struck it. It sifted to the floor. Suddenly the phone rang.

Slater lifted his head. They looked at each other in dismay.

"She couldn't be—" he said.

The phone rang again. He snatched it up.

"Yes? *She is?* My God! Yes. Thanks."

He hurled the phone at the cradle. "Martha's back! She's in the lobby now. You've got to—"

Sitting up, the girl pushed at her hair. "This would be a good time to tell her, no? That is, if you have made up your mind to tell her."

"Not like this!" Slater said, appalled. "If she walks in on—" He gestured at the tumbled bed, the untidy room. "It's out of the question. Goddamn it, will you hurry?"

He seized her arms and pulled her off the bed. She felt among her clothes, which were lying in a heap on a chair.

"So you did not mean the things you said in my ear one minute ago? I am not surprised. I have experience with this habit of men. Promises—"

"I meant it all! It's just—my God, no, there's no time, never mind those things. Just your dress and shoes. Vivienne, darling, please. I can't hurt her this way. She's been hurt so badly already."

"And I!" Vivienne asked, with surprising dignity considering the fact that she was lifting her dress to pull it over her head.

"Nobody can hurt you," he said. "That's one of the things I like about you."

"I am hard, am I?" she cried. She wriggled her dress down over her hips and tugged at the zipper. "I am not flesh and bone, I am made of metal. That is what you think."

"Don't be dumb, baby. I know what you're made of, and it isn't metal. Leave that zipper. Fix it outside."

He handed her a shoe. Hopping on one foot, she put it on, suddenly seeming about to cry. "You have this wonderful idea, you, for making money. Most safe. And good God, how badly we need this money, you and I!

Perhaps it settles nothing, but we need it, to have time to decide. And suddenly you are frightened because they ask you a few questions. Because a judge scolds you. All the thought, the planning—"

Holding the foot of the bed, she thrust her foot into her second shoe. "But Paul, with everything else you are so nice to me! Why are all rich Americans fat and bald and tiresome? Can you answer that?"

"Not right now," he said, pushing the remainder of her clothing at her. "I'll call you tomorrow. Now for God's sake hurry. Here's your garter belt! Christ, if you left that! Go around the corner of the corridor. You can hear the elevator. And don't get the clever idea of coming out ahead of time so she sees you, to settle things that way. It wouldn't be clever at all."

He kissed her forehead quickly and propelled her out the door. There was one good thing, he thought, about this crummy hotel. When the elevator was in operation it clanked horribly, but thank God it still was silent. He watched the French girl. One heel wasn't all the way inside her shoe, and she had to hop. Her dress was tight about the hips. Going or coming, clothed or unclothed, it was a wonderful thing to see the way she moved, and Slater rubbed the back of one hand across his lips, which suddenly seemed very dry. How in heaven's name could he be expected to give that up?

"God," he said softly, and swallowed.

Stepping back, he closed the door and looked around the room quickly. He put the bed in order, drawing the sheets tight and plumping up the pillows. He took out a colorful short-sleeved sports shirt. After he put it on, he examined his face in the mirror. He rubbed lipstick from the corner of his mouth, using a Kleenex which he was careful to flush away. His hair was short enough so it needed no attention.

He forced himself to stand still and look around the

room, taking it one section at a time. The careful scrutiny showed him a lipstick-tipped cigarette. He field-stripped it and threw away the reddened paper. Satisfied, he stretched out on the bed and picked up that week's issue of the *Island Times*, which was still, he saw, almost entirely taken up with the murder of the Englishman, Albert Watts.

But he was too unsettled to read. He threw the paper aside. To disarm suspicion completely, he should be doing something normal and routine. Going to the bathroom, he tucked a towel inside his shirt collar and lathered his face. He had shaved before Vivienne came, and scraping off the lather with long sweeping strokes took only a few seconds. His hand jerked as he finally heard the labored clanking of the elevator. He was pretending to work on the stubborn spot on his upper lip when a key turned in the lock.

"Darling?" he called. "I'm in here."

He went to the bathroom door, the razor in his hand. His wife Martha, an ash-blond with gray eyes and well-marked cheekbones, put down her overnight bag.

"Paul."

She brushed back her hair with a weary gesture, went to the bureau and took a cigarette out of the package there. She held herself with her usual erectness, but she seemed very tired.

She tapped the cigarette on the bureau. "Well, it was a wild-geese chase, I'm afraid. The woman who used to make those wonderful woven trays has been sick for three months, and she didn't have a thing for me. After that there didn't seem to be much point in going on to the other village for a few baskets. I turned tail and came home. I suppose I was a little discouraged, Paul. I've been counting heavily on those trays. Well, one of these days our luck will change."

about. I'm young and able-bodied. I'm not deformed. I have a reasonably good education and good table manners. Somewhere in this world there's a philanthropist who's going to offer me a job."

"Of course there is, darling," she whispered. "The only thing you need is confidence. Thank God you've come to your senses. I was so afraid—"

"Come and sit down. You must be tired."

He took her to the bed. She kicked off her shoes and sat back against the stacked pillows. "You can be so sweet, Paul. What did I do with my cigarette?"

He retrieved it and looked for a match.

"You really are getting absent-minded," she said gaily. "You let another cigarette go out on the table. Before we go looking for your philanthropist, I'm going to break you of the habit of putting a cigarette down wherever you happen to be."

He muttered something. She leaned forward for the light, holding the cigarette between two fingers. Her nostrils flared slightly.

"Aren't you using a new after-shaving lotion, darling?" She sniffed again and said judiciously, "I don't know if I approve or not. It's pretty strong for a man."

"Just trying it out," Slater said, leaning forward so she couldn't see his face. His hands felt damp, and he wiped them on his shorts.

She put the tip of one finger against a mark on his neck, inside the open collar of the sports shirt. There were several slightly irregular indentations there, that might have been made by teeth. Again ~~he~~ ^{she} nostrils flared. She was frowning slightly.

Airplane engines were throbbing ~~high in the sky~~. Slater looked nervously at his watch.

"That must be the plane from ~~London~~ ^{London} late."

CHAPTER 3

Getting down from the horse-drawn carriage that had brought him from the airport, Michael Shayne was greeted by a small English lady who could have been any age between thirty and fifty. She wore a long-sleeved print dress, buttoned to the neck.

"You will be Mr. Shayne," she said firmly. "How d'you do? I am Miss Trivers, your hostess. Welcome to Hibiscus Lodge."

She put her small hand briefly in Shayne's. He found her grip surprisingly strong.

"I'm delighted you decided to come to us, Mr. Shayne," she continued, "and I do hope we can make your stay pleasant. If you will come with me I'll show you your cottage."

She took him through a well-kept garden, along a path that led to the pink stucco cottage Lucy had picked out from a portfolio of pictures in the Miami Beach travel agency. It was pleasantly situated on a rise overlooking a crescent of beach. There were other cottages near it, each with its own patch of lawn and its own garden screening it from the others. The sand below was very white, dotted with clumps of low-growing palms.

The Englishwoman showed him around the cottage, ending where they had begun, in the living room.

"Fine, fine," Shayne told her. "All as advertised."

The carriage driver had put the redhead's battered

suitcase in the bedroom. Shayne pulled out a handful of the British coins he had been given at the airport and held them out to Miss Trivers, who sorted out the proper amount for the fare. The driver was dissatisfied with the size of the tip, but Miss Trivers gave him a crisp nod and he went back down the path, grumbling.

"Now let me see," she said. "What else should I tell you? Dinner's at seven. After you get settled in, why don't you come up to the Lodge and let me give you tea?"

Shayne grinned. "Tea's never been my favorite drink. I think I'll skip it, thanks. I may want to go out fishing in the morning. Wouldn't your local paper have a list of charter outfits?"

"Right here, Mr. Shayne."

The current issue of the *Island Times* was laid out on the coffee table, alongside fresh copies of the popular U.S. weeklies. Miss Trivers, picking it up, glanced at the front-page headline and made a clicking sound with her tongue. She turned the pages until she found the charter-boat ads.

"These are all quite reliable, I believe," she said. "I am not a sportswoman myself."

Shayne took the paper. "I see you people have had a murder."

"Well," she said grudgingly, "yes, we have. But I hope you won't think such a thing is an everyday occurrence with us. It's anything but."

"That's all right," Shayne said, the corners of his mouth twitching. "People get murdered now and then in Miami. I'll feel more at home."

She shot him a sharp look and said severely, "Now Mr. Shayne. You're pulling my leg. It isn't a joking matter for us, I can assure you. I wish there was some way it could have been kept out of the papers, but I suppose

nights, when our young people take on a bit too much rum and get to dancing those rather uninhibited native dances. But that's a matter of sheer animal spirits, and I, for one, am all against bottling them up so they explode in other ways. Those who are complaining the most now never stop to think that the island would be a pretty tame place without our black people. I've heard some pretty drastic proposals in the past week, including a nine o'clock curfew, if you please. Well, do tourists come down here solely to enjoy our sun and our scenery? I beg leave to doubt it! They would leave us in droves."

"You think he was killed by the natives?"

"There's not much doubt about that, I'm afraid. But here is the question, if you really are interested—"

Shayne assured her that he was, and she went on, "Some of the Britishers are saying that we must look on this senseless murder as the first outbreak of nationalist feeling, because why on earth would any native in his senses murder poor Albert Watts except inasmuch as he was a symbol of the ruling race? And if you knew Albert, incidentally, you'd realize that they picked themselves a pretty poor symbol."

"You knew him?"

"Yes indeed. The Wattses live almost across the way, and we British tend to be somewhat clannish on foreign soil, I'm afraid. Daphne Watts, with all her faults, is a great friend of mine. Well, there's talk in certain quarters that we ought to organize a citizens' militia, and strap pistols around our waists, à la Kenya, when the Mau-Maus were on the rampage, otherwise we'll all have our throats cut while we sleep. I say nonsense. Let's keep our heads. Leave the matter to the police, and first and foremost, the native police. I've been on this earth long enough to know that the truth about people will sometimes surprise you. It's true that Albert Watts

seemed the most ordinary man alive, but I say that somebody, I don't know who and I don't know why, had a good reason for wanting him dead."

"I see you've given it considerable thought," Shayne said.

"Indeed I have. Unless you develop a personal theory about this murder, you might as well withdraw entirely from social intercourse. I'm a great reader of mystery stories, actually. It's more or less my vice. If you run out of reading matter while you're here, I have quite an extensive collection at the Lodge. Of course my taste inclines to the Agatha Christie school, and I know you Americans are likely to want a little more raw meat in your diet."

Shayne grinned down at her, which flustered her a little.

"Well, don't you?" she said. "Did I say something wrong?" She looked at her wristwatch. "Good grief, as late as that? I have a thousand things to do before dinner. Now if you want for anything, don't hesitate to ask. We want to make your stay comfortable."

Shayne saw her to the door, then set about making his stay as comfortable as he could by himself. He threw his coat at one chair, his tie at another. He took off his shoes and socks, and sent them in four different directions. By this time the room had begun to look as though someone was living in it. Padding into the bedroom, he opened his suitcase and looked dubiously at the colorful sportswear which Lucy Hamilton had considered suitable for a tropical vacation. Most men Shayne had seen so far on the island had been wearing shorts, but he decided to put that off as long as possible. He pulled out the bottle of cognac he had bought at the airport (the low price in dollars had been a pleasant surprise) and took it to the kitchenette. He slid an ice-tray out of the

little refrigerator unit, found two glasses, and filled one with ice water.

He took the bottle and the glasses to the terrace on the ocean side of the cottage, picking up the *Island Times* on the way. He sank into one of the long outdoor chairs and poured himself a drink. He tasted the cognac, sipped at the ice water, and looked out at the palms, the white sand, and the sparkling blue water. A sailboat tacked across the entrance to the bay. A half dozen fishing boats were coming in. An American family, two grown-ups and two children, had a little encampment at the end of the beach belonging to the cottage colony. The children were digging madly. There was activity beyond, in the sand in front of a resort hotel. Brilliant flowers grew amid the palms.

The chair was comfortable, and Shayne felt himself beginning to relax. He sat up straight with an effort, drank some cognac, and reached for the *Island Times*.

For a moment his eye lingered on the fishing ads. These were illustrated with eloquent photographs of unimpressive-looking fishermen holding up some really impressive fish. Because of the state of his ribs, the game-fish had nothing to fear from Shayne on this trip, but he promised himself that he would get in some light-line bone-fishing if it killed him. He would have a full day before the *Wanted* fliers arrived.

He reluctantly turned back to the first page, to the account of the murder. In an instant he was completely absorbed.

Fifteen minutes later he laid the paper aside and poured himself more cognac. He sampled it thoughtfully, his red brows close together. He looked in the paper again to check an address. Then he took another look around at the pleasant scene, tossed off his drink, and swung his feet down from the long chair. It cost him a

considerable effort. Turning his back on the beach, he went into the cottage and gathered up his shoes and socks. He put them on. He changed into the least colorful of the sports shirts; perhaps, he thought, it was just barely flamboyant enough so he wouldn't be conspicuous.

He walked out past the Lodge to Bayview Road. He was looking for 1306½, and after the second house he saw that he had started in the wrong direction. He strolled on a little farther, looked idly at the view, turned and came back. Passing the Lodge again, he walked past a succession of small suburban villas set in neat gardens. Soon he came to a sign on a picket fence that said: *Journey's End*, and beneath that, *A. Watts*.

A. Watts had indeed reached his journey's end on St. Albans, Shayne reflected. He opened the gate, and was immediately attacked by a small, furious dog, which circled him, yapping wildly and making quick darts at his ankles, until a very fat woman appeared on the front porch and called sternly, "Georgette! Mind your manners!"

She must have weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, which she balanced on small feet in very high heels. Her features seemed almost dainty amid the rolls of fat. Her hair was up in metal curlers.

Shayne advanced up the flagstone path between neatly arranged flower beds. He raised his voice to be heard above the dog's yapping. "Mrs. Watts? My name is Shayne. I'm—"

She looked at him petulantly out of her blue doll's eyes. "I can't hear you."

"I'd like to talk to you privately, if you don't mind."

"Georgette!" she said with pretended fierceness, putting her hands on her hips. "Will you hush? Get inside and be quiet."

She shoed the dog into the house. "Now start all over," she said to Shayne. "I didn't hear one word you

said. People have been trooping in and out all week, and that animal is a bundle of nerves. The doctor says she'll calm down with the passing of time."

The redhead began again. "My name is Michael Shayne. I'm from the International Police Association, and I've been sent down to look into your husband's death. There are some rather odd angles, it seems to us, and frankly we aren't at all satisfied with the way the local police are conducting the investigation."

"Nor am I," she snapped. "It's obvious that—" A man passed on a bicycle, and she lowered her voice. "Come inside, Mr. Shayne. This neighborhood is full of snoops."

She waddled into the house. The dog followed silently.

"I'm glad to see you've decided to behave, Georgette," Mrs. Watts said. "That's my darling. I was just taking a solitary cup of tea, Mr. Shayne. I hope you'll join me?"

"I've already had tea, thanks," Shayne lied.

"One more cup of good tea never hurt anybody."

The furniture in the little living room was covered with flowered chintz, and little knickknacks of china and shell stood on every available inch of surface. Shayne moved carefully, to avoid knocking anything over. Mrs. Watts went to a shelf for another cup. The tea things were spread out on a low table in front of the sofa, the pot hidden beneath a quilted cozy.

Mrs. Watts lowered herself to the sofa. This seemed to be her usual resting-place, for that end of the sofa was badly sprung. Shayne pulled up a straight chair. He refused sugar and cream, and watched his hostess take both.

"Is that the way you like it?" she inquired. "A little more water?"

Shayne took a sip, managing not to make a face. "This is just right. Mrs. Watts—"

"Try one of my little cakes," she urged him. "I know I

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"Try one of my little cakes," she urged him. "I know I

ought to be watching my calories, but now that Albert is gone, I've decided to stop torturing myself. Because what's the use? I was sitting here feeling perfectly miserable, and all of a sudden I said to myself, 'Daphne, old girl, fling caution to the winds. Pull up your socks and get out the cookbook.' I feel almost sinful, and I find that a most stimulating sensation."

She giggled and popped a small cake into her mouth. Her face worked for a moment, like a quicksand bog swallowing an unwary mouse. A drop of chocolate appeared at the corner of her mouth. Her tongue darted out and got it.

Holding the tiny cup and saucer in his large hand, Shayne patiently started over. "In the first place, Mrs. Watts, sooner or later the local police will have to know I'm here, but the longer I can work independently, the better. Don't tell anybody you've talked to me."

"You can count on my absolute discretion," she said. Leaning forward, she added confidentially, "It's my belief that they're covering up for somebody."

"I wouldn't be surprised if that turned out to be true," Shayne said gravely. "I don't want to ask for their files until I have to, so I'll probably take you over ground you've already covered with them. I know this must be very hard for you, Mrs. Watts."

The eagerness faded out of her face, and she became melancholy. She sighed.

Shayne went on, "So far I don't know anything except what's been printed in the paper. Your husband called up from work and told you not to expect him for dinner. He locked the office promptly at six, as usual, and walked off down High Street toward the bay, with his raincoat over his arm, also as usual. At that point he disappeared. The cops haven't turned up anyone who laid eyes on him between two or three minutes after six and midnight, when a native watchman found him lying

dead in a doorway. He had been stabbed three times. His wallet was missing and his pockets were turned inside out. From the trail of blood on the sidewalk, he had fallen several times before he collapsed for good in the doorway. His clothes were badly disheveled. He had been drinking heavily."

"Poppycock!" Mrs. Watts said sharply. "They falsified those blood tests, for obscure reasons of their own, or perhaps not so obscure, after all. Albert was a militant abstainer. He hadn't touched a drop in twenty years."

"He never went to bars or nightclubs?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Shayne. He would sooner have patronized—" She blushed. "Well, I almost said a house of ill repute, but if you had known Albert—" She finished with one of her nervous giggles.

She glanced at the small upright piano. There was a photograph on it, obviously of the dead man. He had worn a bristling cavalryman's mustache, which had been in striking contrast to the rest of his face. His hair and chin had both receded. Even in the photograph his eyes seemed to be watering. There were worried brackets at the corners of his mouth. He had tried to fix the camera with a soldierly stare, but it had been a failure.

Shayne asked, "Was your husband in the war?"

"No, he suffered from a kidney difficulty which kept him a civilian. He was reticent about his feelings, but I believe he felt it keenly. He was painfully shy and introverted, and it might have done him a world of good to rub elbows with men from other walks of life."

Shayne lifted his cup as though about to drink, then set it back on the saucer. He observed, "Shy people don't usually work for travel agencies."

"Oh, he didn't have the kind of position where he was called upon to mingle with the public. He used to refer to himself—he had a dry sense of humor at times—as a high class baggage clerk. He kept accounts, planned

itineraries, placed reservations, and of course he did have a lot to do with baggage. You probably know that American tourists who stay more than a few days are entitled to take back five hundred dollars worth of goods duty-free. You'd be surprised how many people buy things they can't possibly use, merely because they're so much cheaper here. Albert didn't care for tourists, especially ladies. He used to tell some horrendous tales."

Looking away so she wouldn't see what her hand was doing, she picked another little cake out of the basket. It was very hot in the room. Shayne could feel himself perspiring.

"What kind of tales, Mrs. Watts?" he said with an effort.

"Oh, you know what they're like," she said, chewing. "Brassy, immodest in their dress and language, screeching to each other about the sensational bargains. Albert could take them off quite aptly. The thing he chiefly couldn't abide was their frightful sentimentality toward the natives. Charming and unsophisticated, so fresh, so childlike." She snorted. "If they knew these savages the way we do!"

"That's one of the things we wondered about," Shayne said. "Did he have any reason to be in the native quarter the night he was killed? Did he have any native friends, or spend any time there as a rule?"

"I should say not! Quite the opposite. The place is filthy, unsanitary, a perfect sink. Albert was fastidious. He wouldn't have been caught dead in that part of town." She exclaimed, "I didn't mean that the way it sounded. Because he *was* caught dead there, wasn't he? And that's the whole point, you see. Reading the account in the newspaper—and I've seriously considered suing them for slander—what would one conclude? That here was another respectable and hen-pecked husband who had kicked over the traces and gone off to

some low colored dive to make a night of it. He had more rum than was good for him, blundered among thieves, and was just foolish enough and intoxicated enough to put up a fight. All very plausible. But untrue."

"Let's go back to the phone call, Mrs. Watts. Exactly what did he say?"

"Well that," she said, considering, "*was* a bit queer, one must admit. I won't bore you with the ins and outs of island politics, which I don't understand clearly myself, as a matter of fact. In brief, Albert had recently joined a committee to protect the traditional interest in the face of increasing native agitation. He phoned to say that this committee was having an extraordinary session to discuss a confidential matter. He would have a bite of something at a restaurant in town. Very well. So far so good. I had no reason to doubt that there would actually be such a meeting. But he kept on with it, and told me just where the committee would be meeting, who would be there, and this and that—all made up out of whole cloth, because about the one thing our brilliant police have established so far is that no meeting had been scheduled, or even discussed. By the end I said to myself, 'Methinks the lady doth protest too much,' quoting the Bard, you know. He promised to bring home a magazine I had asked for, and those were the last words I heard from Albert in the flesh."

She touched a little napkin to her eyes, although Shayne hadn't noticed any tears.

"Was there any change in him in the last few months?" Shayne asked.

She put her finger to her chin. "Nothing too extraordinary, Mr. Shayne. There were little things. He was wakeful—Albert, who during the whole previous course of our married life had always slept like a log. Sometimes he would go out for what he called brooding walks. He would stride along the sand for hours, and come home

drained and exhausted. And he became increasingly irritable. He was always a phlegmatic person, but one night a few weeks ago he took a rolled-up copy of Punch and struck Georgette a violent blow across the face. All she was doing, poor innocent, was scratching to go out."

Shayne kept his face serious. "Did he ever mention the possibility of coming into a sum of money?"

She shook her head, her fingers moving toward the cake basket. "Money. I think not. One thing—he had always admired the way I managed the household funds, but recently he did tell me that I didn't need to make do with the cheaper cuts. He specifically told me to get top-round from then on, and leave the spareribs to the natives."

It was becoming hotter in the room by the minute. Shayne barely managed to resist an impulse to put down his cup and escape into fresh air.

"A couple of other questions, Mrs. Watts. Did he do much traveling?"

"No, I thought I'd explained that. He had to go to Miami recently for some kind of training course, but that's the only time he stirred off this island in years."

"Did he ever have any dealings with a man named Luis Alvarez?" She shook her head, and he tried another name: "Paul Slater?"

He was watching her closely. She started. "Surely you don't think that nice good-looking Paul Slater could have any connection with—"

"Just a shot in the dark," Shayne said. "He and your husband knew each other?"

"Superficially. We saw the Slaters sometimes at the Yacht Haven dances, or at fireworks displays, that kind of semi-public occasion. Mr. Slater was once kind enough to fetch me an ice at a dance. A most agreeable young man, for an American. I don't mean to imply," she said hastily, "but the Americans one sees on St. Albans—"

"You aren't hurting my feelings," Shayne said.

He put down his cup on the lee of the teapot, so she couldn't see how little he had drunk.

"More tea, Mr. Shayne?"

"No, thanks," he said, standing up. "You've been very helpful, Mrs. Watts, and I'll let you know if I find out anything."

"Do have one of my little cakes, at least," she said. "Dear me, they seem to be all gone. Mr. Shayne, you're so abstemious you quite put me to shame."

She struggled forward, but soon gave up the attempt to rise. "I'm going to be most discourteous and let you find your own way out. I feel a little faint. I don't think of myself as a demonstrative person, but when I speak of Albert, the tears have a way of coming."

She touched her eyes again. The cross little dog let Shayne leave without barking at him. It seemed to the American that the eyes of Albert Watts' portrait followed him as he made his way to the door.

Outside, he mopped his forehead and let out his breath in a long, soundless whistle.

CHAPTER 4

Michael Shayne spent the next day like any other tourist. He left a call with Miss Trivers to be awakened early. After breakfast, he phoned for a cab. One of Miss Trivers' other guests came up to him as he was waiting on the Lodge steps.

This was a tall, sad-faced Englishman named Cecil Powys. He wore a battered tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows. Heavy-rimmed glasses gave him a somewhat owlish look. "I say," he said hesitantly, taking his pipe out of his mouth, "Miss Trivers tells me you plan to go bone-fishing on the flats. Would you mind frightfully if I come along?"

"Glad to have you," Shayne said.

"The price of a charter's too steep for me to manage single-handed," the Englishman said. "Divided in two, it becomes possible. Divided in three or four would be even better. I'll get my impedimenta. Back in a sec."

"They provide the tackle," Shayne said.

"I'm not going out to fish. My forte is spear-fishing, actually. Underwater, you know? I'll explain."

He was back in a moment with what looked to Shayne like a battery-powered tape recorder.

"The whole thing's a trifle ridiculous, when you come right down to it," he said. "I'm reading for a doctor's degree at Oxford in anthropology. Beastly subject, really. I'm writing my dissertation on Folk Beliefs of the Caribbean. It's not going too well." He put the pipe in his mouth and struck a match. "I thought I'd drift around

the islands and let the natives tell me stories. But I'm having the devil's own time getting them to talk. I'm after fishing material at the moment, but it's like pulling teeth. Perhaps they'll open up more when we're out on the water."

The taxi arrived. It proved to be a little British Hillman. Powys slid in with the ease of long experience. Shayne jack-knifed his long legs awkwardly into the back seat and told the driver to take them to the charter-boat dock at the Yacht Haven.

They divided the charter with two other Americans, a man and wife from Chicago. The native captain quickly showed that he knew his business. He took his boat to the far side of an offshore island, cut his motor and let the current move them quietly forward. He tested the wind, peered into the water, and finally said, "Here is good place."

Shayne had his first strike within a minute after his bait hit the water. By the end of the afternoon, when they swung around and headed back toward the Yacht Haven, he had a string of eight handsome bonefish, the largest weighing over ten pounds. The Chicago couple had done nearly as well. Powys had spent the day chatting with the captain and his barefooted deck hand, sometimes switching on the recorder to get a story or anecdote in the island dialect. Shayne persuaded him to take a rod just before they turned back, and he caught the biggest fish of the day.

There was a photographer on the dock with a sixty-second Polaroid Land camera. Shayne borrowed the Englishman's fish and posed for a picture. The photographer made a series of passes over his camera, and took out a large watch with a sweep second-hand. Ten seconds or so passed, and a native policeman strolled out on the dock, dressed in a brilliant blue and red uniform, white helmet and white gloves.

Then Shayne remembered. Half an hour earlier he had heard a big commercial plane pass over. It must have been the Miami plane, bringing the *Wanted* flier with his picture on it. The fliers probably wouldn't be posted this soon, but nevertheless Shayne pulled his beat-up fishing cap forward over his eyes and was busy tightening his shoe laces as the cop went past. The Chicagoans converged on the splendid uniform and begged the cop to pose between them. Pulling down his tunic self-consciously, he agreed, and they formed up on either side and waited for the photographer. Shayne straightened, his back to the cop, and started for the end of the dock.

"Your picture, sahl!" the photographer called. "Five seconds more."

"That's right," Shayne muttered.

He had to turn, but the Americans had maneuvered the cop around so the boat would be in the background. The photographer gave Shayne the picture and a stamped envelope to put it in. Shayne glanced at it; it showed a tall, broad-shouldered American, his eyes shaded by the long peak of his cap, holding up a handsome twelve-pound bonefish and grinning broadly with pleasure. He was slightly sunburned, the picture of health, and clearly didn't have a care in the world. This had been perfectly true sixty seconds ago, before Shayne had remembered the other picture of himself, which Jack Malloy had dug out of a newspaper morgue.

He hastily scrawled Lucy's address on the envelope and dropped it in a mail box across from the cab and carriage stand.

When he presented the string of fish to Miss Trivers for the Lodge kitchen, some of his pleasure returned. The fact was, after a day on the water he felt better than he had in months. He showered, put on clean clothes, and had a peaceful drink on the terrace. Shayne had the

strong feeling that this would be his last peaceful moment for some time, and he made the most of it.

Miss Trivers' native chef stuffed the bonefish and served it in a fiery sauce. After dinner Shayne took a pot of coffee back to his own terrace and drank coffee royals while the sun went down in a wild blaze of color. He waited till the first star was out before he called a carriage.

He was wearing a white Palm Beach jacket. He put all his paper money, a few hundred pounds, in a clip in his side pocket and left his wallet, with his private detective's license, locked inside his suitcase. When he heard a horse's hoofs on the gravel he went out. On the way down the path, he picked a brilliant crimson flower for his buttonhole. That was all he could do by way of disguise.

Getting into the decrepit carriage, he told the driver to take him to town. The driver clucked to his horse, and it clopped off at a leisurely pace. Shayne settled back, an unlighted cigarette in his mouth, and reviewed the situation.

He had talked with detectives and undercover government agents who as part of their jobs had allowed themselves to be recruited by criminal gangs. Shayne had played a similar part once or twice himself, and he was always surprised at how easy it was to get the confidence of a criminal, who logically ought to be more suspicious than an ordinary law-abiding citizen. All that was usually necessary was to drink in the right bars and look touchy and unsociable. But this took time, and time was something Shayne didn't have. The *Wanted* circular had been an off-the-cuff idea, produced under pressure while the pilot of the Miami-St. Albans plane was straining to take off. There were many things wrong with it; it could easily backfire. On the other hand, just as easily work. If the police were looking f

varez, proprietor of the nightclub known as The Pirate's Rendezvous, would have no reason to think that he was anything else than the circulars said he was—a criminal wanted by the American police.

Shayne leaned forward. "I thought I might take in a nightclub. Some place with a good band and a floor-show."

The driver listed three or four before he came to The Pirate's Rendezvous.

"Somebody was telling me about that last one," Shayne said. "It sounds o.k."

The driver grunted. Fifteen minutes later he pulled his horse to a stop in front of a huge sign that showed a peg-legged pirate with a patch over one eye and a parrot on his shoulder. A goombay orchestra was playing inside. The sign was brightly lighted, and there were other similar signs further along the block, but the narrow, cobbled street was empty. Two native policemen were stationed at the corner.

"Looks kind of dead," Shayne said.

"Big crowd later," the driver assured him. "If you don't like, take you to Dirty Ed's—very colorful, very pretty girls."

He gestured with his whip toward one of the other nightclubs. At that moment the two policemen started to saunter toward them, and the redhead said hastily, "No, I'll try this one."

He crossed the wide walk while the cops were still half a block away. Inside, a head waiter greeted him cordially and asked if he wanted a table. Shayne shook his head, turning toward the bar. The bartender was wearing a pirate costume, and there was a lurid mural with a pirate motif above the mirror on the back-bar; but with these exceptions the place resembled a hundred others Shayne had been in around the Caribbean. There were

even some like it in Miami. In the dining room beyond, a few of the tables were occupied and one couple was dancing valiantly on the handkerchief-sized dance floor. The little orchestra played mechanically.

"Is that all the cognac you've got?" he asked the pirate, nodding at an inferior brand against the back-bar.

"Not much call for cognac," the bartender said. He was squat and solidly built, with a powerful chest and shoulders. He had a long, drooping mustache, a several-day-old beard, a bandanna knotted around his head and a gold hoop in one ear. He spoke English with a New York accent. He went on, "But the boss may have a bottle down cellar. Do you want me to—"

"No, the hell with it," Shayne said. "Give me a triple rum. Ice water chaser."

When the bartender set the two glasses in front of him Shayne said, "You're not doing much business."

"Still early," the bartender told him. "We had a little trouble in the neighborhood, and not many walk in off the street. But we're still getting the guided parties from the hotels and the cruises."

"I think I know what you mean," Shayne said. "A gay, uninhibited tour of the exotic native night spots. Price includes two drinks."

"Also includes tips," the bartender said sourly.

Shayne grinned. "Doesn't that get-up make you feel a little silly?"

The bartender gave Shayne a hard look and put both hands palm down on the bar, one on either side of Shayne's drink. "What do you think you're trying to be, Jack? Funny?"

"Hell, no," Shayne said. "Just wondering. Let me buy you a drink."

After a moment the man relaxed. "I'm getting hard to get along with. Either I put a rag on my head or I don't

work here. The rest of it I don't mind, except this god-damn earring. Toward the end of an evening I have to take plenty of cracks."

"Anyway," Shayne said, "they didn't make you cut off one leg."

The bartender wasn't amused. He poured himself a double jigger of rum, saluted Shayne with it, and knocked it back.

Shayne ordered another drink. A party of American vacationers came in, and things began to pick up. The orchestra played another number, with better spirit, enticing two couples out on the floor. Then the drummer, a strapping native in a straw hat and a red shirt, beat out an intricate rhythm, and a dancer ran out from behind the orchestra, wearing a ruffled dress split to the waist, with a brief ruffled top.

When the performance was over, Shayne found that a girl had slid onto the next stool but one. She was dark and slender, with short tumbled hair, and was wearing a revealing white evening gown. She lit a long cigarette.

"I will have a glass of light rum, Al," she said to the bartender, in an accent Shayne couldn't place.

"Why not have it with me?" he suggested.

She breathed out a mouthful of smoke, and only then looked at Shayne coolly. "That is nice of you, but I am afraid I must say no."

"I won't bite you," Shayne said. "What's that nice pronunciation? Are you French?"

He took out his money-clip, squinting to keep the smoke out of his eyes, and when both the girl and the bartender had seen how much money he was carrying, he flipped a pound note onto the bar. Al picked it up and looked at her. She moved her shoulders in a slight shrug.

"Very well, if you wish. Yes, I am French. An unhappy

Parisienne, at present far from the boulevards. You are American, Mr.—?"

"Michael Shayne. Sure. What brings you to St. Albans?"

"Ah, that is a long story. Not a very interesting one, I am afraid. I am an artist, you see. No," she said, as Shayne looked at her questioningly, "not an artist with paint and brush. A dancer. I started off with a group to perform in the South American capitals and later, perhaps, if all went well, in your own country. A supper room in the exciting hotels in New York? Hollywood? Television? Such are the dreams of foolish people. Thank you, Al."

She took the glass of rum and lifted it, without drinking. "And of course, being entertainers from the sinful city of Paris, we are expected to perform—" she made a brief gesture—"in costumes too small to be seen by the naked eye. Very well. One is realistic. Then the pig of a manager took it into his head to vanish with the leading dancer, and what is worse, the money we are owed for three weeks. Engagements canceled. Voilà—we are marooned on this island. The owner here wishes some different entertainment than the other places, so I have a job. For how long I do not know."

She smiled. "You are not listening. I know, it is a tragedy only to me."

"Sure I'm listening," Shayne said. "Let's take our drinks to a table. Hit me again, Al."

He moved his glass toward the bartender, who filled it. Shayne picked up the three glasses, including the girl's. She hesitated, then repeated her slight shrug and followed him to a corner table in the other room. As she sat down she said, "But there is one thing I should make clear."

"I'm ahead of you," Shayne said, interrupting. "Just

because a girl comes from Paris and works in nightclubs. I don't think that necessarily makes her a tramp. Was that what you were worrying about?"

She smiled. "A little. But you have not seen me work. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred—"

"Maybe I'm the hundredth," Shayne said. "Relax."

"You seem to be quite a—nice person, Mr. Michael Shayne." She looked at him over her glass. "You make me feel a little better, I think. I have been sad and discouraged."

Shayne waited a moment. "Don't throw me any bouquets. Any other time I'd be one of those ninety-nine other guys. In fact, in that dress you almost make me forget that I've got my own troubles."

"Troubles," she said, smiling. "What kind of troubles can you have?"

"Never mind, I wouldn't want to spoil your evening," Shayne said. He reached for a cigarette and said casually, "But I'm as anxious to get off this island as you are."

"Impossible." Then she looked at him intently. "Do you happen to be serious?"

Shayne struck a match. "Is there a guy around here they call the Camel?"

Another group of Americans had arrived, noisier than the first. They were being taken to tables. Four couples were dancing, filling the little dance floor almost to capacity. A door had opened beyond the orchestra's raised platform, and a man had come out. He was of middle height, balding, with pouches beneath his eyes. He wore a dark double-breasted suit, and as Shayne mentioned his nickname he half-turned, and Shayne saw the small hump on his back. Having made the identification, he was willing to let it drop, but the girl said softly, "Yes, Alvarez. The owner. He has a boat. But such a service, you know, is expensive."

Shayne grinned. "You don't mean he'd take advantage of somebody in a jam?"

She repeated her elegant little shrug. "But naturally, who would not? Still, there is this. I know only what is said about him, but it is said that when he gives a promise he will keep it, within reason. Shall I tell him your problem?"

"No, I'd better introduce myself," Shayne said.

He signaled a passing waiter.

"None more for me," the girl said. "But I have a sudden idea. I would like to dance with you."

"Another triple and more ice water," Shayne told the waiter, and said to the girl, "I can't dance to this music."

"Certainly you can," she said. "It is very simple, I will show you."

Springing to her feet, her eyes alight, she seized his hand.

CHAPTER 5

After several extremely embarrassing minutes, he began to get the hang of it. When the music stopped, the girl waved at the orchestra leader and it started again. The musicians grinned broadly. The other dancers had

"Presently I give my performance. You will watch me, no? And here is an idea. Only an idea!" she said, holding up one hand. "If you get the Camel's boat, perhaps you would like a passenger?"

She came even closer to him, so she was touching him lightly at several points. "Think about it, eh?" She turned and walked quickly away.

Shayne waited, watching her thoughtfully, till she disappeared backstage. He drank his rum in one long pull without sitting down.

"Telephone?" he asked a nearby waiter.

"Yes, sah," the man said. "Down the stairs, if you please. By the lavatory."

Shayne glanced in at the bar. Alvarez was listening to another man who seemed to be selling him something. The detective went past and descended a badly lighted flight of stairs. At the bottom, across from the door to the men's room, there was a pay phone in a little niche. He looked up a number in the thin directory, sorted through his change until he found a coin that would fit one of the slots, and dropped it in. An operator answered and he gave the number.

Soon a man's voice said gruffly, "Sergeant Brannon here."

Someone came out of the men's room behind him and started up the stairs. Shayne said, "Wait a minute."

He leafed through the directory, waiting to be alone. A voice was coming out of the earphone irritably, "Are you there? Are you there?"

"Sure I'm here," Shayne growled when the other customer had gone up the stairs. "Keep your pants on. I've got some information for you, and you can have it for nothing because I want to see this guy clobbered, but good. Are you listening?"

The voice said, "Who is this, please?"

"Never mind, never mind," Shayne said. "I'm not out

for publicity. If you've got something better to do, I don't want to keep you."

"Go ahead."

"And don't bother to have the call traced. I'm at a ginmill called the Pirate's Roost, or something like that. The bar-man has a ring in one ear. You know the place I mean?"

"Yes. The Pirate's Rendezvous."

"I just saw this crumb Shayne in the bar here. If you send somebody right over you can put the bracelets on him."

There was an instant's pause, and the voice said more alertly, "What was that name?"

"Shayne. Mike Shayne. He's hot right now. I hear the Florida cops want to talk to him. Don't send one man, send two. No, on second thought, make it four."

The voice started to say something, but Shayne hung up. He went back upstairs. At the top, he lit a cigarette and looked around.

The lights were down. Two male dancers were leaping around the little dance floor in the glare of two converging spotlights. The singer who had performed earlier was sitting at Powys' table, and the Englishman's recorder was open. Shayne drifted silently toward the entrance to the bar. Alvarez was still there, and Shayne saw that the bartender had just served him a fresh drink. The redhead circled the room, pausing at the door to the owner's office, marked *No Admittance*. The dance became more frenzied and unrestrained. So far as Shayne could tell, no one was looking in his direction. He felt behind him for the doorknob, found it, opened the door and stepped through.

He shut the door quickly. A lamp was burning on the desk. The only pieces of furniture in the room besides the desk were several straight chairs, a couch, and a large combination safe. The walls, like the walls in nightclub

offices all over the world, were covered with framed pictures of obscure entertainers, most of them autographed.

Shayne reached the window in four long strides and pulled the slats of the Venetian blinds. He tried the safe. It was locked. He tugged at his earlobe, looking around, then sat down in Alvarez' chair and began going through the desk.

He searched quickly and professionally, overlooking nothing, putting everything back in place when he was done with it. In the middle drawer he found an American .45 automatic. He unloaded it, dropping the clip into his side pocket, and then laid the automatic on the desk-top with its muzzle pointing at the drawer. In the bottom drawer he came to a bottle of rum and a glass. He took them out, looked suspiciously at the glass and took a drink from the bottle. It was better rum than Alvarez served the public over his bar.

Finding nothing else of interest, he sat back, lifted his feet to the desk, and waited.

But something remained at the edge of his consciousness. He tried to think—had he seen something in the desk which shouldn't have been there? He brought his feet down and started through the drawers again.

He found it almost at once: a simple listing of radio programs, torn from a newspaper. Shayne looked at the opposite side and saw an ad for a St. Albans hotel. The listings were given for a half dozen stations in the area, from Havana to Kingston. On that day's date, a light pencil line had been drawn around 11 p.m. Shayne checked his watch. It was now 10:25.

He closed the drawer thoughtfully and put his feet back on the desk. Taking the cap off the rum, he took another long drink.

Outside, a girl was singing in French, accompanied only by an intricate beat from a hand-drum. This was probably his new friend, Shayne thought. The crowd was

quiet; apparently she was wearing the kind of costume, or lack of costume, expected of French entertainers. Her voice was thin and appealing, quavering on the high notes. She was well applauded. As the clapping began to die, the door opened and Alvarez came in, looking at his wrist watch.

He stopped dead as he saw Shayne. His glance jumped from the soles of the redhead's shoes to the gun beside them, and back at Shayne's face.

"Come on in," Shayne told him. He nudged the bottle of rum with one foot. "Have a drink of your own liquor. It's not bad."

"Who are you?" Alvarez demanded in a high voice.

"And not only that. What am I doing in your private office without an invitation? Sit down and I'll tell you about it." When Alvarez hesitated, Shayne said politely, "Does the gun bother you?"

Leaning forward suddenly, he picked up the .45 and tossed it to the nightclub owner. Caught by surprise, Alvarez dropped it. He snatched it up from the floor and pointed it. The redhead was pleased to see that it wavered slightly.

"But I've got the clip," Shayne said, "so don't start giving me any orders. Your bar-man may have told you that I'm carrying a modest bankroll. I don't know how you people operate, but I hear the town is a little warm. So I hope you won't get any idea about taking it away from me."

Alvarez checked the gun to see if it was actually empty. He came forward and dropped it on the desk. Then he whipped out a pair of black-rimmed glasses, put them on, and stared at Shayne. The redhead grinned at him.

"I want some transportation," he said. "I didn't think anybody knew me on St. Albans, but it seems there's a sheet going around with my picture on it. I want to get back to the States in a hurry. It's a little cramped here."

"I'll go as high as fifteen hundred. Dollars, not pounds."

Alvarez thrust his glasses back in his pocket. He folded his lips primly and poured several fingers of rum into the glass Shayne had decided not to use.

"What makes you think—"

"Come on, amigo," Shayne said impatiently. "What do you want, references?"

Alvarez sloshed the rum around in the bottom of his glass without drinking it. "It is true, I go here and there about the island, I hear of such things being done. People have boats. I have a boat myself. But for fifteen hundred?"

"It's not like hustling aliens," Shayne said. "I'm a citizen. Somebody takes me out deep-sea fishing and we get lost. I don't know what connections you've got. Maybe we run into a deep-sea boat out of Miami or Key West, accidentally on purpose. Do I have to draw you a diagram?"

Alvarez looked at his watch again, and his mouth twitched. "I must give this a little thought. Please excuse me for the moment. Watch my excellent international floorshow. Come back in one half hour, and we will discuss it. Of course I will want to know who wants you, and for what. That will have a bearing."

Shayne stood up with a muffled exclamation. "You're as jittery as a virgin on her first date. Why I want to go fishing is my own business. Do you want the fifteen hundred or not? If not, say so and I'll try somebody else. I've got a couple of other names."

Before the Camel could answer the phone rang. He looked at Shayne and picked it up.

"Yes. . . . What? Coming here? Yes, yes. Of course I want to hear it. . . ." His eye rested on Shayne as the voice rasped on at the other end of the line, no doubt reading Shayne's description from the *Wanted* flier.

When the voice stopped, Alvarez said crisply, "I do not know him, so there is no problem. Call me later."

He put the phone back as there was a quick double-knock at the door. A waiter put his head in, called something in Spanish, and ducked back out. Alvarez gave Shayne an unfriendly look, consulted his watch again, and swore under his breath.

"Your name is Shayne, and may you fry in hell. The police are here looking for you. Say twenty-five hundred dollars."

Shayne hesitated. "O.k. You seem to have me over a barrel."

"Get up on the desk," Alvarez told him. "Quickly."

Shayne looked at the ceiling, a checkerboard of squares of masonite wallboard. Alvarez made an impatient motion, and the redhead did as he'd been told.

"Now reach up," Alvarez said. "Press. A little more toward me."

Shayne pushed upward with both hands, his fingers spread. A section made up of four of the masonite squares gave way under the pressure.

"Now through," Alvarez said, wiping his face with a silk handkerchief. "Hurry."

Michael Shayne pushed the loose section out of the way, then stooped for the bottle of rum and passed it through. He tested the sides of the opening and swung himself up, feeling a stab of pain in his chest as he put his weight on his arms. Pulling his legs up, he rolled off to one side. He was in a low air-space, some three feet high at its highest point. He worked the trap-door back into place.

Alvarez said beneath him, "If they come in here, please be careful and do not move. Even the smallest movement can be heard."

The office door opened and closed. A thin line of light came through the cracks around the trap-door, and

Shayne saw a shallow wooden box, pushed back against the front wall. He listened carefully. Hearing nothing, he changed position and struck a match. The box was fitted with a hasp and a padlock and the lock hung open. He hitched himself forward till he could reach it. The match burned his fingers. He shook it out and struck another. When he had satisfied himself that the box was empty, he took a long pull at the rum, screwed the cap back on, and settled down to wait.

Five minutes later he heard the door open in the office beneath him. The Camel's voice said, "But search, by all means. Look in the wastebasket, under the rug. Here is a bottle of ink. Perhaps I am hiding a genii in it."

There were sounds of movement. A chair scraped. Shayne, above, was being careful to lie very still.

A British voice said, "Very well, he is not here. You were warned. This is becoming monotonous. I have suspected that one of our people is secretly on your payroll. Would such a thing be possible, do you think?"

"A policeman? In the pay of the notorious Luis Alvarez, who owns a nightclub? A shocking suggestion, Sergeant."

"I agree with you, and one worth investigating."

"I do not understand any of this," Alvarez said. "Tell me who you are looking for, and perhaps I can help you."

"I'm sure you could help me," the sergeant said sarcastically, "but somehow I don't think you will. We're looking for an American named Michael Shayne. I wouldn't say he's the type of person you'd forget seeing, however briefly. His red hair, for example, should make an identification easy. Tall. The look of a heavyweight fighter. Amazingly enough, your bartender and your waiters can't recall if they served such a man or not. Fortunately some of your customers have better memories. They distinctly remember seeing him dancing with one of your entertainers."

"Yes," Alvarez said thoughtfully. "I think I do remember him. But if I had any connection with a man being sought by the police, I would not let him do anything as conspicuous as to dance with such a charming girl in such a daring dress."

"That may be. That may be. Or it's possible that you didn't know he was wanted. I'll give you a word of advice, Alvarez. I've got downwind of one or two of your small transactions lately. Business is business, and that kind of business doesn't concern me much. I've passed on what I know to the American authorities, and if you want to take that as a warning, you're welcome to it."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Alvarez said stiffly.

"I'm talking about smuggling, as you bloody well know. You've imported luxury items which you haven't sold locally, and which I assume you haven't been giving away. Smuggling doesn't turn into a crime until the goods pass the American customs, and that's out of my jurisdiction. But a man has been murdered, and that, Alvarez, is very much within my jurisdiction."

Alvarez sniffed. In his hiding place Shayne heard the supercilious little sniff clearly. "I hope you don't think I could do anything so stupid."

"Not personally. But if Watts was working for you, if he broke a contract and you had him killed, I intend to see that you hang for it, even if somebody else actually used the knife."

"That Watts was working for me?" The amazement in Alvarez' voice seemed genuine to Shayne.

The policeman continued, "I don't think he was stabbed on the street where he was found. I think he was stabbed in a car, and dropped where he was because the murderer knew that no one in that neighborhood would give any co-operation to the police. From that day to

this, we've done nothing but follow blind leads. I, for one, am tired of it. So I'm taking in a few of your people. With any luck at all I can hold them for twenty-four hours. I don't know how this Michael Shayne fits into the picture, if he fits into it at all, but perhaps in twenty-four hours I can get them to admit he was here."

The Camel's voice was suddenly choked and ugly. "You are making a mistake, Sergeant."

"That may very well be," the other responded. "We will find out."

There was a quick clatter of footsteps. Alvarez said urgently, "I will speak to them. Why should they not admit the American was here? He means nothing to me. One word will clear it up."

"Tomorrow, Alvarez."

A little scuffle followed, and the Englishman's voice came again. He said coldly and quietly, "Take your hands off me."

Shayne made an interested face in the darkness. He had a cramp in one leg; in another minute or two he would have to move, no matter what stage the argument had reached below. But that ended it. There were more footsteps. The door slammed. Alvarez swore angrily in Spanish and kicked over a chair. He went out, and Shayne at last was able to roll over. He moved his wrist so he could see his watch. It was ten minutes to eleven. If the radio schedule had indicated an eleven o'clock appointment, it was rapidly approaching.

Again the door opened and closed. "Shayne?" the Camel's voice said. "Come down now."

Shayne lifted the trap-door and lowered himself. As his feet touched the desk, one leg caved in and he nearly fell.

"You—you—" Alvarez said incoherently. "Why couldn't you call on the phone and tell me quietly? But

no. You had to get out on the dance floor so only a blind man could fail to see you."

"I didn't know they had a *Wanted* sheet out on me already," Shayne said, massaging his leg. "You ought to put an air mattress up there. What's the charge, did the guy on the phone say?"

"Armed robbery."

Shayne chuckled. "Could be worse."

He reached up into the little attic for the rum, then worked the door back into position. After he got down from the desk, Alvarez wiped off his footprints with his silk handkerchief.

"What I should do," Alvarez said, "is wash my hands of the whole thing. You make trouble for me, I knew that the first minute I saw you."

He looked at his watch again, and clapped his hand over his wrist. "I could choke you with these hands! A mess you make of this, you blundering imbecile!"

English was not a flexible enough language to express his feelings, and he fell back on Spanish. He took a few nervous steps, and returned to the desk. He looked searchingly at Shayne, who was unscrewing the cap of the rum bottle.

"Something wrong?" the redhead said innocently.

"Wrong! One works everything out carefully, takes all possibilities into account, and then a large stupid North American lumbers in like a bull in a parlor—"

He broke off abruptly. "Can you drive a car?"

Shayne raised his eyebrows. "Sure."

"Then I will do you a service and get you off the island. But first you will do a service for me. The two men I could trust, they are now, thanks to you, in jail. You will have to take their place."

Shayne balanced the bottle lightly in both hands. "Better tell me something about it, amigo. I like to know what I'm doing."

"It is nothing so complicated, after all. You are to follow me in a car and pick me up when I tell you. Then we go to another place, and after that, directly to the dock and you leave St. Albans before you get me into more trouble, God forbid. First the bullets, please."

He put out his hand. Shayne gave him the clip for the .45 and watched him load the gun.

"You don't just want a driver," the redhead said, settling himself on the desk. "Even an American imbecile like me can figure that out."

The Camel's mouth was twitching again. "That is true," he admitted, and continued reluctantly, "I meet a certain person tonight. I am not altogether sure I trust this person. I would not wish an accident to happen. No special exertion on your part is necessary. It will be enough if you are present." He added more sharply, "And are you in any position to refuse?"

"I'm not refusing," Shayne said. He fished out a cigarette and a match, and struck the match on his thumbnail. "But when the cops showed up, you bumped the tariff from fifteen hundred to twenty-five. Now let's be reasonable. Make it an even thousand and I'm with you."

Alvarez looked at him with distaste. "So. It is a bargain. Although you exaggerate the value of your service, Mr. Shayne. It is merely insurance against an unpleasantness. I am delivering a car. You are to follow me closely. I will leave the car in a garage, and you will take me where I tell you. There I will exchange the keys to the car for a sum of money. That is all."

Shayne laughed and stood up. "It's a hell of a complicated way to run a railroad."

"But it is not your railroad, is it? I begin to think that I will be relieved to see the last of you, Mr. Shayne. Now," he said with the spinsterish primness that seemed to be habitual with him, "here is what you must do."

CHAPTER 6

Michael Shayne, cigarette dangling from his lips, switched out the light after Alvarez left the office. Going to the window, he adjusted the slats of the blind and raised it all the way. The window was already up as far as it would go. Kneeling and keeping close to the window frame, he looked out cautiously.

He would have only a three-foot drop to a cobblestoned alley. A cat was prowling along it, a big yellow tom. Seeing Shayne, the animal froze and gave him a look of intense suspicion—possibly wondering, Shayne thought wryly, if the American was actually wanted for armed robbery by the Florida police.

He heard an automobile motor. It idled a moment, stalled. That was the signal. When it took hold again, Shayne swung one of his long legs over the sill. At his first move, the cat whirled about and disappeared. The redhead let himself down to his full length and dropped to the cobblestones as a small British car with Alvarez at the wheel turned the corner. The motor and transmission seemed very loud to Shayne in the narrow alley. As the car braked, the door swung open. Shayne backed in.

Alvarez snapped, "Get down. They may have another man in back."

"What do you mean, get down?" Shayne growled. "I'm down as far as I can go."

But by putting his head between his shoulders and twisting sideward, he managed to slide a lit

Alvarez accelerated rapidly. The tires squealed as he turned the corner.

"Not yet!" he said, as Shayne started to raise his head.

After a few more blocks he gave Shayne permission to get up on the seat. They were leaving the narrow, twisting streets of the Old Town, Shayne saw, heading inland. The Camel's eyes darted busily back and forth between the road ahead and the rear-view mirror. Presently he swung to the right and pulled up beside another of the little cars which, with the exception of bicycles and carriages, were the only means of transport on the island.

He gave Shayne a key. "For the ignition. Do not follow me too closely. When I pull into a garage, stop fifty feet behind, but keep the motor running. I will leave the car and start walking. Come up to me and I will get in."

"What if a cop sees me? I'd better carry the gun."

Alvarez mopped his forehead with his silk handkerchief. "The shooting of a policeman—that is all we need. No, if you are seen and they give chase, our arrangements are off. Go where you please from then on. But I do not think that will happen. We have few policemen, and they are busy elsewhere."

"O.k.," Shayne said, his voice resigned. "Where's the starter on these bugs?"

Alvarez showed him. The redhead transferred to the other car. Alvarez waited till he found the necessary pulls and switches, and had the lights on and the motor turning over. When Alvarez pulled away, Shayne put the Hillman in gear and followed, watching for sign-posts and trying to memorize the route in case he had to follow it again. He had to resist an impulse to drift over to the righthand side of the road, where he felt he belonged. They left the settled part of the town. Well out in the country, the tail-lights ahead turned abruptly and

road. Shayne followed. Coming to a hard-surface road again after a little more than four kilometers, they soon were in a suburb of little detached villas, each with its own brick wall and garden. Since leaving the nightclub, they had met only two cars. Shayne shielded his face, as though dazzled by the headlights.

The red brake lights flashed on the Camel's car. The directional arrow was blinking for a right turn. This seemed to be the place. When Alvarez came to a full stop, Shayne swung over against the curb. He was on a slight downward slope; he set the emergency and shifted into neutral. There was only an occasional streetlight in this part of town, but Alvarez had left his headlights on full, and Shayne saw him get out of the Hillman and hurry to unlock the door of a one-car garage, set back from the street just far enough so the doors would be flush with the sidewalk when they were open. Alvarez opened first one, then the other, ran back to his car and drove into the garage. He cut the motor and the lights.

Shayne glanced at his watch; it was 11:20.

In the stillness, the panting of the Hillman's motor seemed very loud. Shayne saw only one or two lighted windows in nearby villas—this was clearly a neighborhood where people went to bed early. He started a cigarette and hunched over the wheel, one hand on the gearshift lever, watching the open doors of the garage.

For a man in a hurry, Alvarez was taking his time. The garage doors remained open. No light or sound of movement came from within. It occurred to Shayne that he hadn't heard the car door slam. He drew deeply on his cigarette. He let another minute pass. The conviction was growing inside him that something had happened, something not on the schedule.

He turned off his motor. The night was full of small noises; none of them interested Shayne. He took off the

emergency and coasted silently down to the garage, leaving his lights on high-beam. He leaned across to the open window on the inner side and called in a low voice, "Alvarez."

There was no answer. The night noises continued around him.

Getting out of the car, Shayne warily approached the garage. In the side-glow from his headlights, he could see that the front door of the other car gaped open. The hood was up. There was a small window in the back wall of the garage. When he saw that that, too, was open, Shayne knew what he would find even before he stumbled over the body.

Alvarez, in his neat blue business suit, lay face down on the front seat. Shayne flipped away his cigarette and squatted beside him. A monkey wrench, partially wrapped in an oily rag, lay nearby. All the lines on Shayne's face were deeply etched. When Alvarez drove the car into the garage, someone had been standing in the corner where he would not be seen in the headlights. Alvarez had turned off the lights and started to get out of the car; his assailant had stepped forward and hit him with the monkey wrench from behind.

That much was clear. Straightening, the redhead dusted his fingers lightly and went to the open window. There was a gravel path outside. Again he listened carefully but heard nothing.

The interior of the luggage space was in deep shadow, but he knew without checking that whatever Alvarez had brought was no longer there. The key was still in the lock. He left it and went back to the Camel's body.

Stooping, he took Alvarez under the arms and dragged him out from the car so he could close the door. After he had done that, he rolled the unconscious man on his back, supporting him under the shoulders. He ~~was~~

breathing harshly. Shayne felt for a pulse. It was irregular and very fast.

Suddenly Alvarez sat up with a shout, seizing Shayne's lapels, his eyes staring. He screamed something in Spanish and struck out wildly. His doubled-up fist caught Shayne on the mouth. It was more of a push than a blow, but the American was sitting back on his heels and it knocked him off balance. He fell backward on his hands. Alvarez, released, rolled on one elbow, and when Shayne looked at him again he saw that the Venezuelan had snatched out his gun.

"Cut it out, for God's sake," Shayne growled.

"Where is the—"

Shayne interrupted roughly. "Use your head. You were slugged getting out of the car. I wasn't anywhere near you. Somebody was waiting when you drove in."

Alvarez looked at him stupidly, and Shayne said, his voice heavy with anger, "Put it away. If I slugged you, would I still be here?"

Alvarez touched the back of his head, wincing. Then he twisted suddenly and saw the raised hood. "Look in the luggage space. See if—"

"It's gone," Shayne said. "The window's open back there. If you don't know what happened by now, that crack on the head must have scrambled your brains. You've been robbed, and not by me."

Alvarez thought for a moment. "I must telephone."

"It also might be a smart move to get the hell out of here," Shayne said.

Going to the front of the Hillman, he slammed the hood and took out the keys. As he came back, Alvarez made an effort to rise, but slumped back on his elbows.

"If you're going anywhere, walk," Shayne said coldly. "Don't expect me to carry you."

Alvarez tried again, and succeeded in getting to one knee. Shayne made a disgusted sound, put an arm

the door, and Shayne caught him before he fell. He half-carried the Venezuelan into the cottage, knocked over a chair on the way across the living room. He dumped his burden on the sofa and turned on a lamp.

Alvarez was goggling up at him, gasping. "This pain—do you have an aspirin?"

Shayne laughed. "You need more than an aspirin, amigo. You need a head X-ray and a few weeks in a nursing home."

Shayne produced glasses and his bottle of cognac. After a quick search through his suitcase he found a tin of aspirin tablets. He gave this to Alvarez, who gulped down four, two at a time, and followed them with a stiff peg of cognac.

He shuddered as the cognac took hold. "That is better. Where is your phone?"

"In the bedroom, if you can make it," Shayne said.

"I can make it."

He came erect, and stood swaying for a moment, leaning on the back of a chair.

"Want some help?" Shayne asked, watching him narrowly.

Alvarez shook his head and reached the bedroom doorway in three lurching steps. There he rested again. Gathering his strength, he plunged forward and collapsed on the bed.

Shayne handed him the phone. He waited, breathing hard. After the sixth long breath he rattled for the operator.

Shayne took off his white coat, which was badly soiled where Alvarez had grabbed it, and changed back into the gray tropical worsted he had worn from Miami. Alvarez rattled the phone impatiently.

"What is the matter with this damned operator? Shayne, get me some ice. This pain is so bad I can't

think. And I must think. In a towel, a wash-cloth—anything.”

The redhead went to the little kitchenette. He opened the midget refrigerator and turned on the hot water faucet. Leaving the water running, he quietly returned to the living room so he could hear what his guest was saying. Alvarez was talking very rapidly in Spanish. It was too fast for Shayne. He listened for a moment. When Alvarez didn't switch back to English, Shayne returned to the kitchenette.

The ice-tray was an ancient model. He had to wait till the water ran hot before it would warm up the tray enough to release the cubes. He wrapped half a dozen in a dish-towel and took them to the bedroom, where Alvarez seized them gratefully and pressed them to his temples.

“Yes, yes,” he said into the phone in English. “But yesterday! Yesterday. I want to know his exact words. Did he say he had not decided if he would do it? Or precisely what?”

Shayne returned to the living room and sat down to his cognac. His eyes were hard.

“And in the end?” Alvarez said. “How did you leave it? You persuaded him?”

He listened for some time.

“All right,” he said. “I understand that. Still you had a feeling that he would go ahead as planned? This is important. I must know exactly.”

There was another long pause. “And then today on the phone?”

There was a longer pause before he spoke again. “No, no. I am not criticizing you. He is not an easy person, and you do very well with him. When do you see him again?”

A moment after that Alvarez exclaimed, “If he comes

back! What do you mean *if he comes back*? He can't be leaving St. Albans! But when? How?"

He waited for an answer.

"At midnight! Why didn't you tell me? Blessed Mary, that's in five minutes. I cannot—Wait. Wait there a minute."

Shayne's muscles tightened.

In the bedroom Alvarez said slowly, "Call the airport. Have them get Slater for you. Insist on speaking to him, don't allow them to put you off. Tell him he must come to you at once. You are hurt. No, no. That is not enough. God, this pain! His wife is not going with him?"

Shayne poured cognac while Alvarez listened to the answer.

"Good, good," Alvarez said, beginning to sound more sure of himself. "If they have quarreled, she will not be at the airport to see him leave. What do you say, if the wicked Señor Alvarez has the innocent blonde-haired Martha Slater in his clutches, will Paul hasten to rescue her? Do not answer. Perhaps he will merely laugh loudly, but I must try it at least. You told me he feels great guilt about these meetings with you. Now he will feel more so because of the quarrel. Yes, I think with luck I can get my hands on Paul Slater, and he will be sorry he hit Luis Alvarez with a wrench. . . . What? I don't care if you believe it or not. If you had my headache you would know it happened. Ring off."

Shayne heard him rattling for the operator. There was a sound of pages being flipped rapidly, and Alvarez gave the operator a number. Another moment passed, during which Shayne could hear the faint pulse of a ringing phone.

Then the Camel was saying urgently, "Hello, hello. Police headquarters here. Listen to me carefully. You have a chartered plane scheduled to take off for the U.S. at midnight. I don't know the company, or the name of

the pilot. There is a passenger aboard, an American, Paul Slater. S-l-a-t-e-r. I have to talk to him at once. At once! A life is at stake."

There was an objection at the other end of the line, but Alvarez raised his voice and rode it down. "This is an emergency! Damn your rules and regulations. He must not be allowed to leave. Do you understand? Good."

He drummed his fingers against the side of the bed, and called, "Shayne! Any more cognac?"

Shayne got up to show him the empty bottle. "Do you want some of mine?"

"No, no." And into the phone: "He's coming? All right, yes. I am holding on."

He bent forward over the phone, his lips drawn back in a concentrated expression of viciousness. Shayne watched him for a moment. Feeling the redhead's eyes on him, Alvarez looked up. Shayne went back to his drink.

"Well, Paul," Alvarez said smoothly. "I am so sorry to interrupt your departure. At the very last moment, too. . . . The police? No, indeed, this is your old friend and ex-business colleague. I say ex because after tonight I somehow think our business connection has come to an end. How does it happen that you neglected to let me know you were leaving?"

Shayne's faculties were strained to the utmost. Alvarez said, "I would not take that tone with me, Paul. Of course it is some business of mine, what you do and do not do. I am distressed to hear that you must fly to your mother's side. The sickness must be grave indeed, to make you leave without saying good-by to your friends. Indeed, grief would appear to have unhinged your reason." His voice hardened. "Did you really think you could get away with it?"

A moment's silence followed.

"What, indeed?" Alvarez said savagely. "Of course you are anxious to be on your way. I understand your feelings. Why do you think I called you? To implore you to return what you have stolen from me? I am not so innocent. Or do you think I am holding you on the phone till my men have time to reach the airport? I thought of that, but they could never get there in time, and how could they force their way onto the field? I have made a better arrangement. Your wife is here with me."

After listening to Slater's response, he laughed unpleasantly. "Patience, patience. She is perfectly all right, although we had to hit her several times before she agreed to come with us. I would let you speak to her, but I fear she would urge you to complete your escape. Her morale seems excellent. She is quite defiant, as a matter of fact. I have a scratched face from her fingernails. I admire her for it, Paul. I assure you she will not be hurt unless you continue to do these foolish things. Come to me and we can talk things over sensibly and reach a sensible conclusion."

He continued in a moment, "I see your position. There is a large sum of money involved, and you want to make your calculations. If you return to the plane, what horrible thing, after all, can happen?" His voice climbed shrilly. "You will not see her again, Slater! You have been quarreling. This is a small island, news travels quickly. I know all about it. You have behaved foolishly with another woman. Perhaps it will not matter to you that your wife is dead. Perhaps you will be pleased. This is a chance I must take."

He listened again. "I would not? You are wrong, dead wrong. If I promise you something and you pay no attention to me, I would have to do it, or no one would be impressed with me from that time on. Every petty thief in the islands would think he can rob Alvarez and

have nothing to fear. I do not care to sound melodramatic, but this is what I will do. I will take her out in my boat. Sometime later, I will return alone, minus your lovely wife, minus my oyster knife, minus my anchor."

He paused, and Shayne heard the faint note of relief in his voice when he spoke again. "I was sure you would look on it sensibly, Paul. We will be at the country place. You know the way. Get a taxi. Half an hour should do it easily. If you are delayed by a flat tire, or anything of that nature, be sure to phone me. I wouldn't want anything to happen I would regret."

He hung up. Shayne swallowed the last of the cognac and went over to the doorway. Alvarez still had his hand on the phone. He winked at Shayne, pleased with his own cleverness. Signaling the operator again, he gave her another number.

When the connection was open he said abruptly, "Who is this, Al? . . . I want three men and a car. In a hurry. Try José first. His brother, if you can get him. Offer six pounds apiece for the night, go to ten if you have to. Tell them to meet at the Half Moon. I will be waiting there in the Minx. Have you got that?"

Shayne could see the ugly outline of the .45 in the Venezuelan's right coat pocket. He waited until the bartender had repeated the instructions and hung up. Then he stepped around the foot of the bed. Reaching down, he took the Camel's right wrist and yanked him forward.

"Don't try to reach the gun," Shayne told him gently, "or you'll be in worse shape than you are now. I heard some of that. You've worked up quite a crowded schedule. And where do I fit in? You made a deal with me, and I'd like to see some action on it."

"Things have changed. I—"

Shayne took a quick backward step, jerking his feet. Without putting pressure anywh

the wrist, Shayne walked him backward until he slammed against the wall. The man's face, gray to begin with, had turned a disagreeable shade of off-white.

"You seem to have problems," Shayne said. "So long as you don't forget that I'm one of them. I'm beginning to wonder if you're figuring on dumping me. I wouldn't like that."

"Talk about it!" Alvarez gasped.

"Sure. But let's talk about it now. Let's not wait till three or four guys show up."

"If you will let go—"

Shayne looked into his eyes for a moment longer, his own hard and unfriendly, then threw the wrist away in disgust. Alvarez swayed, but made it to the foot of the bed before he fell. Shayne didn't help him. Little by little his strength came back, and he pulled himself into a sitting position, rubbing the wrist and looking at Shayne with hatred.

"You swine."

"Never mind the compliments," Shayne told him. "What's on the program? I don't want to be put off till everything else is out of the way. I think I heard you mention dropping somebody off a boat. That boat is going to be busy, because I'm going to be on it."

"I said things have changed. The boat is out of the question. Thanks to your blundering, the boat's captain is in jail."

Shayne made a threatening gesture, and Alvarez said shrilly, "Do not hit me, Shayne!"

A moment passed, during which they did nothing but look at each other.

"I have had another idea, if you will control yourself," Alvarez said. "Believe me, you are much on my mind. I am trying to keep six knives in the air at one time. This man I just talked to—he has a chartered plane waiting at the airport. He has been cleared for departure. We

will persuade him to let you use his credentials. Give the pilot a hundred pounds additional, and he will put you down wherever you please in Florida."

"How do you persuade the guy?" Shayne said doubtfully.

"That will not be difficult, I think," Alvarez said. "When we straighten out another matter, he will no longer be in a hurry to leave. I do not concern myself about his feelings, in any case. I am in his debt for a bad knock on the head."

Shayne pulled at his earlobe. "I don't like it. What makes you think he'll fall for that crap you were handing out on the phone.—Yeah, I heard it. What did you want me to do, put my fingers in my ears? You told him you had his wife."

"I will have her," Alvarez said calmly. "We will stop at her hotel and pick her up. It is on our way."

"I don't like that word we," Shayne said. "I don't give a damn how many people you kidnap, so long as you don't take all night. But leave me out of it."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible. I will need your help. But do not excite yourself—it will be simple."

Shayne snorted. "This other thing was supposed to be simple. Just drive a car in a garage. No trouble at all. And if you'd set it up so I was driving the car, I would have been skulled with a monkey wrench. Let's talk some sense, goddamn it. Too many people know what I look like by now. Why stick my neck out when I don't have to? When you get the guy's papers, come back and pick me up. I'll be here."

Alvarez was shaking his head. "It cannot be done that way. We are wasting time, but I see I must explain. I caught Slater off-balance. I persuaded him to do what I said because he has a strong guilty feeling—the details are unimportant. His brain was frozen, but after some minutes it will unfreeze and he will wonder if I am

merely bluffing, if the woman is actually with me. If this is true, the safest thing for him will be to return to the airport and leave by plane with the utmost speed. He will wish to make sure. He will phone me and insist on speaking to her. I must be able to let him hear her voice. Now do you understand?"

"It still has nothing to do with me," Shayne said. "Send your boys out to meet him at the airport."

"No. No. It is much too public, also much too chancy. I do not wish to call attention to myself at the moment; my position is delicate. If they missed connections, the plane would depart and you would still be here, Mr. Shayne, surrounded by police who have seen your picture."

Shayne swore under his breath. Then he said grudgingly, "I guess you know more about it than I do. What am I supposed to do this time?"

"She lives in a second-rate beach hotel. It would be most unwise for us to break in and try to take her by force. We would arouse the hotel, the police would be summoned. It must be handled discreetly. She must walk out quietly, of her own will. She would not come with me, or with one of my men. But you are a fellow-American. We will invent a plausible story, and she will come like a lamb."

Shayne continued to tug at his earlobe. Alvarez added, "The plane will be already paid for by Slater, and I will put you safely aboard without charging you a shilling."

Making up his mind, Shayne shook a cigarette out of a pack. "All right, but don't try to work any more switches."

"I have promised."

"And I hope you keep your promise," Shayne said, "for your sake. What's this doll like? What do I say to her?"

"Damn right it'll be better," Shayne said.

When Alvarez got out, Shayne drove on to where the street dead-ended at a low embankment. With its short wheelbase, the Hillman was an easy car to turn. When he came back, Alvarez was coming down the hotel steps, and Shayne had a sudden impression that he was not as hurt as he pretended. His eyes narrowing, the red-head watched him falter and put his hand to his forehead, as though suddenly dizzy. He crossed the sidewalk to the Hillman and got in.

"This will be easy," he said. "There is one man only, for the desk, the switchboard, the elevator. Look in the window. When he goes up in the elevator or must answer the phone, you will simply walk in to the stairs. Good luck."

Shayne stayed where he was. "What if the phone doesn't ring or if nobody wants the elevator?"

"My men will be here presently. I will send one to telephone. The room is on the fifth floor, five forty-two. From the stairs go to the first turning in the corridor."

Shayne unlatched the door. "How much time do I have? You told the husband half an hour. If I get hung up somewhere, I don't want you sitting down here counting the minutes until you send your army in after me."

Alvarez said, "Take the time you need. I have a man to entertain Slater until we arrive, and I will tell him what to say if Slater calls. I agree that you must be quiet and careful."

"And what do I do if I can get her to come with me? No, don't tell me. I ring for the elevator. When it doesn't show up right away, I get impatient and drag her down the stairs. That way the desk clerk won't see me."

"Excellent."

Shayne left the Hillman and went up to the front

steps. There was a broad porch overlooking the bay. Instead of entering the lobby he went along the porch, past a line of empty rocking chairs, until he came to a window through which he could look into the lobby. No one was behind the desk. Moving to the next window, Shayne saw the switchboard, but it was unattended. He located the elevator. The door was closed, and an arrow above was moving slowly around a semi-circle. There was a loud, ominous clanking.

He returned to the front door and entered the lobby. The arrow had stopped at four. Through an archway he looked into the dining room, with tables set for breakfast. He reached the bottom of the stairs as the clanking resumed and the elevator started down.

He took the steps two at a time. The elevator, descending slowly and painfully, passed him between the second and the third floor. He continued to five, found Room 542 without trouble, and knocked.

The transom was open and light was on in the room. When there was no answer, Shayne knocked again.

"Mrs. Slater?" he said cautiously.

He heard a faint noise, and saw the doorknob beginning to turn slowly. Then the door came violently open. Martha Slater was standing in the doorway, a gun in her hand.

CHAPTER 7

"Come in," she said.

Her voice was small but determined. The gun was a little .25 automatic. She held it firmly. Michael Shayne came into the room and she kicked the door shut behind him. She was wearing a tightly belted blue dressing gown. Her blonde hair was brushed out loosely and fell almost to her shoulders. There were lines and shadows on her face that hadn't been there when Shayne last saw her, but she was still, at thirty, beautiful, intelligent, self-possessed. Her eyes were gray and steady.

"Don't you know who I am?" he said.

"Stay where you are. Don't move."

She backed across the room, feeling for the phone. Her fingers touched the edge of the bedside table and she knocked over a small bottle of sleeping pills. She lifted the phone.

Then she said suddenly, "*Michael Shayne?*"

She looked at him in horror. An instant later she dropped the little gun as though it had bitten her. "Michael! I almost—" She laughed hysterically and put her face in both hands.

He reached her in two strides and caught her in his arms. She pressed her face fiercely against his chest. "Michael. Michael. What are you doing here?" Then she pulled away from him, the look of horror still in her eyes, and said faintly, "Did you come after Paul?"

"Take it easy," Shayne said in his gentlest tone. He

put the phone back in its place. "It's going to work out. Come over here and sit down."

He led her to the bed and arranged the pillows. After she was settled he sat down beside her, holding her hands. They were cold and trembling.

"I just made some cocoa," she said abstractedly, looking toward the little bedside table, which was badly marked with cigarette burns. "We aren't supposed to cook, but I have an electric plate. No, I remember," she said, seeming hardly aware of what she was saying, "you'd like some cognac. I'm sorry I can't—"

He stopped her. "We don't have too much time. When I knocked at the door, who did you think it was?"

She burst into tears. "Michael, we've got ourselves into such a mess! What on earth am I going to do?"

"We'll think of something."

He grinned at her encouragingly and looked around. The bureau had a caster missing, and tipped drunkenly. The rug was threadbare. It was worse than he expected, and he hated to see Martha living like this. He moved a box of Kleenex where she could reach it.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Michael. It's just—seeing you like this, after so many years—"

Taking her by the shoulders, he gave her a quick shake. "Stop it. I won't tell you how glad I am to see you, because we don't have time. I know it's serious. You and Paul are in trouble, and if you want me to help you you've got to tell me a few things. What about the gun?"

She blew her nose and said faintly, "I don't know how to begin. I've been expecting something to happen for months. I thought—"

She couldn't go on, and Shayne said, "You thought it had something to do with the smuggling?"

Her eyes widened. "Of course. You heard he'd been

and you didn't like the idea of an old
ng married to a criminal. I don't like it either.
stopped, Michael! You don't have to worry
s. He won't do anything like that again."
a little more complicated than that," he said. "I
about it from the customs agent-in-charge in
i, Jack Malloy. Do you remember him?"
f course," she said quietly. "Another old friend who
s—"

er eyes filled, and Shayne said quickly, "Keep talk-
about it, Martha. It may not seem so bad when it's
t where we can look at it."
"Michael, don't you see?" she said desperately. "I
new about it. I'm as much to blame as Paul. Oh, I ar-
gued against it, but he could tell I didn't mean it. He
just laughed at me, and went right ahead. I didn't re-
fuse to take the money he made by it, you notice! Cer-
tainly not. That might have convinced him I was serious.
I finally laid down the law, gave him a clear-cut set of
alternatives, but not until after he'd been caught! I'm
so ashamed."

"How long has it gone on?"

"Oh, Michael, for months and months. A man came
to Paul and offered to sell him some cheap perfume for
export. He—"

"Was his name Alvarez?"

She drew in her breath in surprise. "Luis Alvarez. Yes
Do you mean Jack Malloy knows about that?"

"Not yet. Go on."

"Well, Alvarez explained it. What he wanted our fir-
to handle was bottled as toilet water. Actually it was
concentrated essence of some famous French perfu-
worth hundreds and hundreds of dollars an ounce. I
didn't tell me about it till it was all over. It was sim-
ity itself. He consigned the shipment to a dummy
pany, picked it up and forwarded it to a big pe-

company up north. For this trifling service, he was paid fifteen hundred dollars! I was horrified, but apparently not quite horrified enough. Actually, I used to feel irritated by the price my friends paid for imported perfume, and I suppose that smuggling it past the customs didn't seem like such a terrible crime. Paul put the money in the business, and it just disappeared. Although I've suddenly begun to wonder if he could have spent it on—but never mind. Alvarez had another proposition soon afterward. There was never any trouble, and Paul paid less and less attention when I tried to get him to think about what he was doing. Then all of a sudden he was arrested, and it did something horrible to him, Michael. I've never seen a man so reduced. And all for a silly little handful of watch movements!"

"You think that was all he had?"

She frowned. "I assumed—but they have some kind of X-ray machine, don't they? I've always been told that once they're suspicious of you, you can't bring in as much as a carpet tack without their knowing about it."

"Jack Malloy has a theory, but there's probably nothing to it. You said you gave Paul some alternatives?"

"Yes, I told him that if he didn't stop for good. I'd leave him. From now on they'll take extra precautions when Paul comes in. I used to think I was a fairly honest person, but I'm learning some unpleasant truths about myself. Did I give him that ultimatum because what he was doing was wrong, or because he'd surely get caught if he tried again? I don't know, Michael."

"And he agreed to quit?" Shayne said thoughtfully.

"Finally. We had quite a knockdown, drag-out fight, and even after we'd made our peace and he swore a solemn oath, I think he was still a little tempted. Apparently Alvarez has made a new offer that was very hard to turn down. I don't know much about that man, but I imagine he got rather ugly when Paul said he was

I thought he'd sent someone for Paul, and he was knocking on my door. But thank heaven for midnight. Paul's beyond his reach, and I'm going to see to it that he doesn't come back. As of twelve tonight, our firm is out of business. What's more, Shayne poured some cocoa from the little pot into my waiting cup. He had been feeling his way blindly, he couldn't do anything effective without knowing a few more facts. He had ten minutes, perhaps fifteen at the outside.

He handed Martha the cup. "Better drink this. I'm going to ask you some questions, and I have a few things to tell you. Then we'll decide what to do."

"Michael, before you start, I want to tell you how wonderful it is to see you. I've been so terribly tense and upset, and now all at once I begin to think that things may turn out all right. That's what I remember about you—how reassuring you could be. Without saying anything, just by being there. I've kept up with our cases, and I've always been so proud of knowing you—I'm afraid I boasted about it a little sometimes."

Shayne shook his head. "No. When this is over, I'll tell you about my secretary, Lucy Hamilton. You were married to a cop. I think you'd understand why I don't want to let anyone in for—" He broke off abruptly. "But that's neither here nor there. Why did Paul charter a plane tonight instead of waiting for a regular flight in the morning?"

"His mother's doctor cabled him. She's very sick and wants to see him. They've always been very close. If you want to know the truth, I don't think she's all that sick—she's a bit of a hypochondriac. I shouldn't be saying this, but I'll bet any amount of money that she'll still be around thirty years from now. But Alvarez had had

threatening Paul, and it suddenly occurred to me that here was my chance to wipe the slate clean. I could use my mother-in-law's sickness to get Paul away before anything happened. Needless to say, we can't afford to charter a plane. But I insisted. I made all the arrangements and bundled him into a taxi, without giving him time to open his mouth to protest. And to show you how wealthy we've become, with all of Paul's desperate smuggling, after scraping up enough to pay for the plane I was feeling too poor to pay for a taxi back from the airport. So I said good-by to him here."

"Did you actually see that cable?" Shayne asked.

"No," she said, puzzled. "He read it to me on the phone. But why?"

"Well, brace yourself," he said bluntly. "I may be all wrong, but here's how it looks to me. I don't think there was any cable. He needed an excuse to get off the island in a hurry, without waiting till morning. He set up a date with Alvarez for tonight. When Alvarez showed up, Paul slugged him with a monkey wrench and took the contraband without paying for it. This was risky, but he planned to be on a plane half an hour later, and he planned to let you persuade him not to come back."

Martha set the cocoa back on the bedside table, being very careful to keep it from spilling. She said slowly, "I don't believe it."

"I was there with Alvarez," Shayne said. "I didn't see who did the slugging, but I do know he was slugged."

"It wasn't Paul!" she said, putting her hand impulsively on his arm. "I know him, Michael. He couldn't have done it."

Shayne, who had had some experience with husbands and wives, knew how little they often knew about each other. He said skeptically, "When did he leave?"

"He wanted to allow plenty of time for all the red-tape. About a quarter to eleven?" she said hopefully.

"Maybe later. He called from the airport to say goodbye. That must have been around eleven-thirty. Wouldn't that prove—"

"He could say he was at the airport and not be there."

"Well, I don't suppose I can convince you, Michael. But you just don't know how impossible it is. If you could find the taxi driver, couldn't he settle it? No, the simplest thing will be to cable Jack Malloy. Have him meet Paul's plane, and find out if he's smuggling anything."

"Paul didn't take off," Shayne said.

The color drained slowly out of her face as she stared at him. "Alvarez thinks Paul hit him with a wrench and robbed him, and *Paul is still on St. Albans?*"

The redhead nodded somberly.

"But how did it happen?" she said. "Did something go wrong with the plane?"

Shayne shook his head. "Alvarez got him on the phone just before he took off. He told him he's holding you as hostage, and warned him not to leave if he wanted to see you again."

She breathed out in a kind of shudder. "And Paul stayed? Thank God."

She went on quickly, "There's something I haven't told you, Michael. It's mixed up with the rest in a queer way, I don't know how. He's been seeing another woman, apparently for some time. I only found out about it yesterday. Oh, things have been quite hectic around here for the last twenty-four hours. At the end he promised to give up both the smuggling and the girl, but I'm not sure I believed him. That's the real reason I didn't go to the airport. I was wrung dry. But Michael—if he knows that Alvarez suspects him of doing this crazy thing, he must know how dangerous it is to stay on the

island." She turned her head. "And if in spite of that he stayed—"

She sat erect and said briskly, "What are we going to do about it, Michael?"

"We'll try to put him back on the plane. Alvarez told him to go to some place in the country. A cab from the airport could make it in half an hour. Does that mean anything to you?"

She moved her head, frowning. "I don't understand. How do you know all this, Michael? And you said you were there when Alvarez was robbed. You haven't got into trouble on my account, have you?"

Shayne grinned at her. "Nothing serious."

Her breath caught, and her face was suddenly flooded with comprehension. "He's waiting downstairs!"

She swung off the bed and went to the window, approaching it cautiously from one side. Drawing back the curtain a few inches, she peeped out.

"Two cars," she said quietly, turning. "Yes, of course. Before Paul puts his head in the noose he'll want to make sure that Alvarez isn't bluffing."

"That's right. So here's what we'll do. I'll tell Alvarez I talked you into coming with me, but something made you suspicious and you gave me the slip. Get out by the back door. Steal somebody's bike and get as far as you can in five minutes. Then stay out of sight. Maybe Paul will have sense enough to keep clear. If he doesn't, he'll have an easier time holding up under the pressure if you aren't around."

"Michael, wait a minute. Did you say half an hour from the airport? It seems to me Paul once pointed out a driveway that went into a wonderful modern house, and said something mysterious about the wages of sin. I'll just bet—it must be!" she exclaimed, becoming excited. "Michael, he'll wait downstairs, won't he? Al-

varez? If we could get a taxi, maybe we could get there ahead of him and warn Paul."

Shayne snapped his fingers. "All right, we'll try it. Get your clothes on."

She ran to the closet and snatched a skirt and blouse off a hanger. She pulled open bureau drawers. Carrying the bundle of clothes, she hurried to the bathroom.

"Leave the door open," Shayne called. "I've got some more questions to ask you. Did you or Paul know Albert Watts?"

"Who?" she said behind the partly closed door. "You mean the Englishman who was killed?"

"That's the one. Did he have any connection with the smuggling?"

"I'm trying to think," she answered after a brief pause. "I don't see how. He had some kind of job with a tourist agency, didn't he? A strange little man with a mustache, a very fat wife. I was maneuvered into dancing with him once—quite against his will. He suffered agonies because we hadn't been properly introduced. I thought it was terribly sad. Such a conventional little fellow, and then to be killed in such a disreputable and conventional way. I'm hurrying, Michael."

Suddenly she appeared in the open doorway, looking at Shayne, aghast. She put on the skirt and had an arm in one sleeve of the blouse.

"Michael, you don't think Paul had any connection with that!"

Shayne lit a cigarette and spoke around it, his eyes squinting against the smoke. "Watts made a trip to Miami to find out how much the customs service pays informants. A little later Malloy got a cable from him, fingering Paul Slater. That's how Paul happened to get arrested. When all Malloy's boys could find were a few measly watch movements, they wrote Watts down as a nut, without much sense of proportion, and didn't give

Paul a real hard look. If it hadn't been for those watch movements, Paul would have been followed around every second he was in the States. Then Watts was stabbed before he could collect his two-bit fee."

Martha abruptly became aware of being only partially dressed, and disappeared. Her voice came through the opening. "And Jack thinks—"

"What else could he think? The cops here don't know about the cable. Jack wanted to see what I could find out, if anything, before he turned it over. And as soon as he does, they'll pull Paul in and hit him with it. This is pretty rough on you, but you might as well know it now."

She opened the door again, buttoning her blouse. "But Michael," she said beseechingly, "he was drunk, wasn't he? The paper said they took a bloodtest. Everybody says he must have got into a fight in some bar. He belonged to that idiotic committee that's so down on the natives, and he made some belligerent remark while he was drinking, and a native followed him out to the street and they fought."

"All that is possible," Shayne said, "but after the cops hear about the cable to Malloy, they won't think it's very likely. And there are two points about that five-hundred-dollar fine. If a pigeon like Watts can give away a small shipment, he can give away a big one. And Malloy has a wild idea that Paul was bringing in something big that they didn't catch. The watch movements were a decoy."

Martha tucked in her blouse, laughing shortly. "Wild idea is right. You can tell Jack from me that Paul is very definitely in the minor leagues as a smuggler, or else it's a well-kept secret. Seriously, Michael, this is something I really think I'd know. I know that keeping two women at one time can run into money, but goodness—I could show you his socks. I don't mean to sound frivolous,

but he doesn't have a whole pair to his name. His shorts are ready for the ragbag. And as for murdering anybody—no." She shook her head. "That is something you must stop thinking about. I said I was sure he couldn't lie in wait for somebody and hit him from behind. If there was enough money at stake, and he thought he wouldn't get caught, maybe he could talk himself into trying it. But something would go wrong. He'd swing an instant too soon or an instant too late, if he could do it at all. And I'm glad he's that kind of person."

"The killing was a week ago Wednesday," Shayne said. "Sometime between six, when Watts left his office, and twelve-thirty the next morning. Do you know where Paul was during that time?"

She smiled. "Of course. Sometimes we go our separate ways in the daytime, but we always meet for dinner and spend the evening together. We have a dozen favorite picnic spots—picnics aren't as expensive as eating in restaurants! Every now and then, once every two or three weeks, perhaps, one of us goes out on a buying or a scouting trip. But last week—"

She was putting on a pair of high-heeled shoes. She straightened suddenly, her face very still. "Well, one day last week—it wasn't Wednesday. But I can look it up."

She put on her second shoe and went to the little drop-leaf desk. There she rummaged about until she found an engagement calendar. Her back was turned to Shayne, but the redhead knew what she had found even before she swung around to face him.

"It was Wednesday," she said. "I hired a car and drove across to a fishing village where we know some people who make wonderful glazed bowls. I've been in such a daze—I could have sworn it was earlier in the week. I wanted to save paying for a room, so I drove back that same night. I doubt if I got in before eleven."

But that doesn't mean anything, Michael. We just have to ask Paul what he was doing, and—"

She paused, and went on hopelessly, "No, he told me he packed a few sandwiches and went for a long bike ride. Unless he was lying, and he was with that girl? But Michael, it's all beside the point! He didn't do it, and that's that. Why does it have to be Paul, just because it was his name in the cable? Why not Alvarez? Everything else about this was his doing. He could have found out about Watts. Of course he wouldn't do it himself—he'd hire somebody. I think you'll find that Luis Alvarez was in some extremely public place, with twenty people watching him every minute."

She kicked off her high-heeled shoes, and went to the closet for a pair with low heels. She fumbled with the laces. She was trying to speak calmly, but Shayne could see the marks of tension.

"It's beginning to sink in at last," she said. "And I can remember when I actually had a sneaking feeling of admiration for Paul, when he made that huge fee taking in the perfume. It seemed almost romantic. But now! My God, Michael. Alvarez thinks Paul robbed him. Watts was killed for considerably less."

She wasn't far from hysteria. She pulled one of the laces too tight and it snapped.

"Let it go," Shayne said. "Alvarez is probably getting restless."

"Michael, find out who did kill Watts! I'll hire you. If you don't, they'll pin it on Paul. I can see it coming."

"Tell me one thing. In spite of this babe of his and all the rest of it, do you still want to keep the marriage going?"

As she stood up, she gave him one of the dreamy, diddly looks he remembered. "I don't know," she said simply. "It was a real kick in the teeth for me, finding out about this girl. Things can't be exactly the same

again, no matter what happens. He promised me today that he would break with Alvarez. If I find out that he lied to me about that—Michael, I don't know. I think—I'm still in love with him. I probably always will be. I don't want anything bad to happen to him. But ask me if I want to stay married to him after I find out the real truth."

Shayne rubbed out his cigarette. "When this is over, will you give me a complete statement of everything you know about the smuggling?"

She didn't hesitate. "Yes, Michael. It will be a horrible thing to have to put down in black and white, and I hope you won't have to use it. But I want to put an end to this nightmare, once and for all."

She felt in her handbag and took out a pound note.

"What's that for?" Shayne asked.

"If anybody asks you if you have a client, don't you want to be able to say you've been given a retainer?"

Shayne grinned, taking the note and putting it in his pocket. "That doesn't mean they'll believe me. No, leave the light on," he said as she reached automatically for the light switch. "No point in letting them know we're leaving."

He approached the window carefully, keeping well back from the lighted rectangle, and drew the curtain aside. The Hillman was where he had left it, and a slightly larger car had pulled up behind it. He could make out two figures in the shadows. One of these, in a dark suit, was probably Alvarez. There was a third man at the wheel of the second car.

Martha was nervously putting on lipstick. She blotted her lips on a Kleenex and said, "We can go out through the laundry room in the basement. There's a big hotel farther along the shore. I think we can get a taxi there." She waited with her hand on the doorknob. "You've brought me some bad news tonight, Michael. Paying"

you that silly retainer doesn't change anything, but it makes me feel better. I'm not exactly unbiased on the subject of Michael Shayne. If anybody can make sense out of this, you can."

He grinned at her and they went out. The fact that Shayne now had a client would give him a slight tactical advantage when he came to talk to the cops, but in another sense it was unimportant. Sooner or later in most of his cases, a moment came when he no longer cared whether he would end up with a fee or not, even whether he would come through with a whole skin. He had lived with danger so long it no longer meant anything to him. He was like a structural steel worker who spends his working day high in the air on a strip of steel a few inches wide. That was simply the way he made his living. There was only one thing he cared about, and that was to get to the bottom of the problem that faced him.

He had arrived at this point now. He wouldn't have come this far if Martha hadn't been an old friend, but that, too, no longer mattered. Someone had killed an obscure Englishman, Albert Watts. Watts meant nothing to Shayne, but his killer meant a great deal. From now on there was an almost emotional bond between Shayne and the killer. It would be broken only when Shayne had trapped him and made him admit his guilt.

On the third floor, Martha rang for the elevator. They could hear the sound of the buzzer beneath them in the shaft. They went quietly to the next landing and waited to hear the clanking as the elevator started up. When there was still no sound, Martha went back to the third floor and gave the desk clerk another long, urgent summons. They listened again. She whispered to Shayne, "He must be asleep."

They went down the last flight to the lobby. She looked cautiously around the corner. Then, looking back at Shayne, she drew a little diagram in the air, showing

which way to go. He followed her into the lobby. He caught a swift glimpse of the clerk, an old colored man, tipped back precariously on his stool, his eyes closed and his mouth wide open. Martha opened the door to the basement stairs and motioned him ahead of her.

When the door closed they were in utter darkness. He put her hand on his shoulder. His fingers closed on a railing. He groped ahead with his other hand and went down slowly, feeling his way a step at a time.

At the bottom he whispered, "I'm going to light a match. We don't want to kick anything over."

As the match flared they started forward, hand in hand. The way was fairly clear. After the match flickered out he went by memory for a few more steps before stopping to light another. This one took them to the door of the laundry room. Clawing a cobweb out of his eyes, he went on. The third match was still burning when they reached the outside door. He shook it out.

He felt her hands on his arms. She was very close. Her fingers brushed his cheek.

"Thank you, Michael," she said. "For everything."

She opened the door. For a moment he saw her slight figure against the stars.

He followed her out, and a blinding light struck him in the eyes. A voice said, "Hold it, Shayne," and something jabbed him hard beneath the left arm.

It was a bad place for Shayne to be hit. A wave of pain rose around him and nearly pulled him under.

CHAPTER 8

He was aware of a flurry of movement just in front of him. The flashlight swung in a vicious upward arc and cracked Martha across the head. Then the man holding the flashlight reached around her and wrested the little automatic out of her hand. He was small and dark, Shayne saw, with a twisted mouth. Shayne raised his arm and looked down at the heavy gun pressed against the break in his ribs. Turning slowly, he looked over his shoulder at Al, the heavy-set bartender from the Camel's nightclub. He still wore the drooping villainous mustache, but he no longer had the bandanna over his head or the ring in his ear. He was almost bald.

"That's right," Al said. "You're being careful. Don't move for a minute and we'll get the boss. Whistle, José."

He felt Shayne's body for weapons. The smaller man was saying something rapidly in Spanish. He feinted at Martha with the heavy flashlight, and she retreated against the wall. He was smiling, showing pointed yellow teeth. He stabbed the flashlight at Shayne's eyes, and kicked the redhead very hard beneath the right kneecap. Shayne gritted his teeth. José gave a light, wild laugh.

"Tell him to keep away from me," Shayne said coldly, "or you'll have to shoot me. The Camel may not like that."

"The bastard can't speak English," Al said. "José, get back there, goddamn it, or I'll break you in two."

sponded with another swift outburst in Spanish. ed, without succeeding in making much noise. wowed his disgust. Putting two fingers to his lips, uced a piercing blast. Then he danced up to again. Looking up at the bigger man slyly, he ack his foot, as though for another kick, aiming up. Shayne regarded him steadily, his fingers be- g to curl. José gave another brainless laugh and ng down, spat on the ground between them. drew back from Shayne, motioning with his y gun. "Back up against the house. Next to the . Keep your hands out where I can see them, and t't try to jump anybody. The boss tells me you're on a anted sheet, and any guy who plugs you gets a thank- u letter from the governor. And at the same time, i rns out you're a private eye. We're all impressed. We on't get many of those down here."

"I'm on vacation," Shayne said wearily. "Some vacation," Al said with a laugh. "Most people come here for their health. But not you, boy. You've butting your nose in other people's business, and ain't healthy."

"I see you took off your earring," Shayne commented, watching him. "I can't tell in this light—how about the nascara?"

Al's jaws snapped together, and his head came forward. "Don't try to needle me. I take worse than that six nights a week from the local winos. Goddamn it, José, will you cool off?" He stepped forward to block the smaller man as he made another swift dart at Shayne. He explained, "He's probably never had a chance to kick a private eye in his life. He's excited."

Alvarez and two others ran around the corner of the building. Shayne wasted no time on Alvarez, having studied him earlier in the evening, but gave the other a close scrutiny as they came within range of the flas-

light. Both were Latins. One vaguely resembled José, but was larger, with a hairline mustache; he was probably José's brother. The other, a plump, moon-faced youth, looked a little simple-minded.

"Well, Shayne," Alvarez said, out of breath from the short run. He clapped his horn-rimmed glasses on his nose and peered at the American. "I thought you seemed a little smart to be a hoodlum. You fooled me with that police circular. Your timing on that was very good. But I think I fooled you a little in return, eh? Perhaps I was not quite so unconscious from this knock on the head as you thought. I sent you out for ice-cubes so I could look in your suitcase. And what did I find? A Florida private detective's license, complete with fingerprints. Who you are working for, that I still do not know."

"Mrs. Slater," Shayne said evenly.

"I assumed as much. I was laughing in my sleeve when I brought you here to get her. I knew you would bring her out with no fuss or noise—out the back door, into our arms."

"I'm sorry, Michael," Martha said miserably.

"That's all right," Shayne said, his eyes moving from face to face around the little semi-circle. "You can't win them all."

"So now we make haste," Alvarez said. "We will have to conduct Mrs. Slater to the rendezvous with her husband, where we will find out who is going around hitting people on the head with heavy wrenches. We will tighten the screws on this Paul Slater. He is not so much, in my opinion. I will ask him politely, and then José will ask him impolitely. This is a specialty of José, who can make a fish talk, as the popular saying goes. If Slater is stubborn, we will ask the same questions of his wife in his presence. From this José will get even greater pleasure, I think."

bobbed his head, grinning.
"Al," Martha said warningly as Shayne stirred.
"he will be careful," Alvarez assured her. "North
an private detectives, whatever else one may say
them, are well known to be perfectly sane. If they
ne case, they wish to remain alive to take another.
ichael Shayne will stand still and allow us to tie
up. Of this I am sure. Pedro, you have the line?"
was true that the redhead had very little choice
.45, held unwaveringly in Al's rocklike fist, w
ed point-blank at his stomach. José had Marth
, if nothing else. The moon-faced youth had his ha
the side pocket of his jacket.
José's brother took out a small reel of fishing line
leased the long blade of a spring-knife with a
gly click. He cut off a length of the line and advanced
on Shayne.

José let go another burst of Spanish. Alvarez toler-
antly shook his head.

"He asks my permission to shoot you once in each
nee," Alvarez said. "A charming imagination. This
would certainly interfere with your freedom of action,
but I have another plan, a better one."
Shayne ignored him and went on concentrating on Al.
"If he told you to pull that trigger, what would you
do?"

"Pull the trigger," Al said calmly. "I told you to stop
needling me."

"Loyalty today is all too rare," Alvarez said smugly.
Pedro pulled Shayne's hands together behind him and
tied them at the wrists. Suddenly the .25 in José's hand
went off with a sharp crack. A comical look of surprise
and consternation appeared in his mean little eyes. The
gun had been pointing downward, and Shayne saw
where a chip had been bitten out of the concrete.
Al said, "But you better do something about this

or I'm going to have to lay his face open. He's beginning to get on my nerves."

Alvarez shot an order at José, who put the gun away sheepishly. Again Shayne heard the vicious snick of a knife behind him. After cutting another length of fishing line, Pedro began tying Shayne's ankles, moving swiftly and surely. He threw a loop of line around one ankle, cinched it tight, then with another loop pulled Shayne's feet together and made fast.

"I'd like to ask one question," Shayne said, looking at Alvarez. "How many people can testify what you were doing a week ago Wednesday, between six and midnight?"

Squinting, Alvarez swung a roundhouse right at the redhead's jaw. Shayne watched it coming. At the last instant he bent his knees, taking the blow on his forehead. It probably hurt Alvarez more than it did him, but because Shayne's ankles were lashed together it knocked him down. He twisted as he fell, taking the jolt on his hip and shoulder.

"You need some work on the heavy bag," Shayne said caustically. "I'll be asking you that question again."

Stooping, Pedro forced a folded handkerchief between Shayne's teeth and bound it in place with another length of the waxed fishing line.

"I may not be here to answer you," Alvarez said. "If all goes well with my friends the Slaters, I think I will use that plane Paul has chartered. Not to go to the States, however! As for you, it would distress me if someone came along and untied you. I am hardly ever in a position to do the police a favor, so I think I will tell them where to find you. I have your detective's license, so you may find it difficult to convince them who you are. Good night, Shayne. I won't say it's been a pleasure."

"I'll make it up to you, Michael," Martha called.
"I'm—"

It ended in a moan. She was hurried away. The flashlight disappeared around the building, and Shayne was left alone in the dark. Car doors slammed. One motor roared, then the other, and the little cavalcade moved away very fast. He tried to determine which way they turned at the corner, but from where he lay it was impossible to tell.

In a moment Shayne's eyes had adjusted to the absence of artificial light. The night was clear, without a moon. He seemed to be lying at the foot of a gently sloping concrete ramp. He could probably succeed in wriggling to the top, but even if he could roll in among the low palms before the cops arrived, they would have no trouble finding him. His one chance was to make enough noise so he could wake up somebody in the hotel and get them to untie him.

He jack-knifed about, struggling into a sitting position. Hitching sideward, first moving his legs, then leaning backward so he could support his weight on his clenched fists, he reached the doorway. He backed rough into the blackness.

He tried to remember the arrangement of the laundry facilities, as he had seen them briefly in the feeble glow of the paper match. There were stationary tubs along one wall, a bench off to the left, an indoors clothesline, shaped like the ribs of a huge umbrella. Somewhere on the floor near the bench he thought he had glimpsed a squat, two-handled utensil, a wash basin of some kind. He hitched painfully across the rough concrete in what he hoped was the right direction.

The line was cutting his wrists cruelly. Each time he moved he had to use more effort than the time before. Lying full length, he tried rolling. He rolled twice, splashing through a puddle of brackish water. Twisting around, he lashed out with both legs. His shins struck something sharp, and the bench went over with a crash

and a ring of metal. Shayne kicked the bench out of his way and tried to find the basin. He reached it after a moment's floundering. One heel struck against it with a resounding clang.

He rested for a moment, breathing hard. But time was passing. He maneuvered into a position where he could raise his legs and swing them against the basin. The noise seemed very loud, echoing back and forth between the cinder-block walls. With each kick the basin moved a few inches and he had to shift position. From time to time he stopped to listen, but except for the sound of his own panting breath he could hear nothing. If he had succeeded in awakening the desk clerk, the old man was afraid to come down to the basement to see what was going on.

Shayne kicked at the basin twice more. The second kick sent it spinning out of reach. He hitched himself after it, and knocked over the pole holding the inside clothesline. The whole awkward contraption came down on top of him. The heavy pole missed him narrowly, but the web of ropes was all around him. He tried again to reach the basin, and the ropes tightened. As he backed away, trying to work free, he cut the back of one hand against the bottom of the pole. He felt the stab of pain and swore deep in his throat. Then, realizing in a flash what had happened, he maneuvered cautiously backward to bring his wrists against the sharp edge. The metal binding around the base of the pole had been knocked loose, exposing a jagged corner of metal a quarter of an inch across. The little spur of metal raked the back of his hand again. He worked it very carefully between his wrists and began rocking backward and forward.

Then he heard the car.

It came around the corner, tires screaming. The driver shifted into high only an instant before he had to slam

my jurisdiction. You really got yourself tangled up, didn't you?" He motioned to one of his men and said, "Cut him loose."

The cop produced a pen-knife. Wielding it delicately, he cut the fishing line that bound Shayne's ankles. After that he cut the line around his mouth. The redhead spat out the handkerchief, but picked it up again to wrap around his cut wrist. The cop helped him free himself from the clothesline, and quickly went over him to see if he was carrying a gun.

"Get up," the sergeant said, "and don't give us any trouble."

Shayne did as he was told. He stamped one foot to get the circulation going. When he tried to speak, he only succeeded in bringing forth an unintelligible croak. He cleared his throat and tried again. This time the muscles worked.

"Do you want to know who murdered Albert Watts?"

For a moment the sergeant looked at him in silence. Then he said, "Don't tell me you did."

"He turned in a customs tip on an American named Paul Slater before he was killed. Slater was caught and fined, and came back to St. Albans. So maybe Watts wasn't killed by a native, after all. Does any of this interest you?"

"Right now," the sergeant said, "whether I'm interested or not is neither here nor there. If you want to buy your way out of this with information, you're talking to the wrong man. You can take it up with the inspector in the morning."

"It won't be worth anything in the morning," Shayne said. "There's a large-scale smuggling operation under way on this island, as I think you know. If you move fast you can break it up while the inspector's still asleep. And while you're doing that you can find out who murdered Watts."

are feeling talkative, aren't you?" the sergeant said. "But let's wait and have a stenographer take it all down. Just said it can't wait," Shayne told him impatiently. "The time everything's signed and witnessed and all documents have been filled out in triplicate, Alvarez will be in some other country."

"Who did you say?" the sergeant said, pushing his head forward. "You heard me. Luis Alvarez. Use a little imagination and you can put him out of business for good. Law enforcement around here will be easier when that son of a bitch is behind bars."

"Where does Alvarez come into this?" "Slater was working for him as a courier," Shayne said. "That tip from Watts was as bad for him as it was for Slater. There's been some fancy double-crossing going on tonight. Slater was about to take off for the States in a chartered plane. Alvarez kidnaped his wife and threatened to kill her unless Slater got off the plane and came in to explain himself. Do you follow that, or do you want me to go over it again?"

"Where are they, at Alvarez' nightclub?" "No. I don't know where they are, but maybe we can figure it out."

The sergeant hesitated. "Kidnaping, double-crossing, blackmail," he said suspiciously. "What are you saying exactly? That Alvarez killed Watts?"

"I don't know who killed Watts. I do know that he was killed because of the tip he turned in on Slater."

"Do you have some evidence of this that you'd like to tell us about?"

Shayne skipped quickly back over the few hard facts he had picked up in the last few hours. "No. Nothing definite. Alvarez has an illegal shipment he was supposed to pass on to Slater tonight. You arrested

able Señor Alvarez who trussed you up like this told us where we could lay our hands on you. You made him ill-will and would like to use the police for your late revenge. I have been in this business long enough now that such little fallings-out often have most useful results for honest men. In the morning we will tie it out with the inspector, and you can give us all corroborating details which you have apparently been skipping over."

"The morning—" Shayne began hotly. "Will be too late," the sergeant said. "I believe you told us that already. But we have nobody's word for it but yours, do we? And your bona fides are hardly of the best."

He nodded to the two policemen, who had been standing alertly, one on either side of Shayne. "Take him in." Shayne whirled, a dangerous look on his scored face, his hands well out from his sides.

The sergeant said, "I wouldn't recommend any resistance. My men are picked for both strength and dexterity."

"Yeah," Shayne growled. "But I can give them some trouble. You can make it easier on all of us if you listen to me for a minute. Alvarez and a bunch of goons—including one really vicious type whose first name is José, another named Pedro, the bartender from that pirate joint of Alvarez', and one more whose name I didn't find out—picked up Martha Slater ten minutes ago. They're giving her and her husband a going over somewhere in the country, half an hour's drive from the airport. You've got some of the Camel's boys in jail. Lean on them a little and find out where this place is."

"We don't lean on people down here."

"Then say please!" Shayne exclaimed in sudden exasperation. "There's a big chunk of dough tied up in this deal. Play it too cool and you'll end up in the morn-

ing with a couple more killings. Alvarez was talking about taking Mrs. Slater out for a one-way sail. Doesn't that sound a little like the Luis Alvarez you know?"

The sergeant seemed half-convinced. "I would need a warrant."

"You've had a murder. How many more do you need before you can get a judge to issue a search-warrant? Bring in the whole bunch and ask some questions. One of them is the killer, or I'm crazy."

"Now, that," the Englishman said coldly, "is an interesting possibility. And what is your motive in all this? Are you really naïve enough to think that you can persuade us not to turn you over to the American authorities?"

"Raid this place before anything happens, and I don't care what you do to me. If you need a motive, I don't want to see anybody twist Martha Slater's arm. She's a good-looking blonde and an old friend of mine."

The sergeant shook his head decisively. "And what am I to tell the inspector in the morning? That I kept my men up all night, blundering about the island in the dark on some wild-goose chase—and on the unsupported word of an American crook? No, thank you. I am not quite that wet behind the ears."

He brushed at his mustache again in that oddly familiar gesture.

"You don't need to tell him where the information came from," Shayne said. "Take a chance. What can you lose?"

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps quite a lot. I know too little about this to act intelligently. I'm not convinced there is such an overwhelming need for haste. We'll go into it in the morning, never fear. I'll have Alvarez picked up, as well as this Slater chap, and we'll see what exactly is what."

Shayne's time had run out. He had only one other card

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to play, and like the *Wanted* circular, it could easily turn into a firecracker and go off in his face. He said, speaking evenly and fast, "That flier on me was a fake. I'm not wanted by the cops in Florida, or anywhere else. I'm a private detective from Miami. Mrs. Slater knows her husband will be suspected of killing Watts, and she's retained me to find out who did it. I also checked with the American customs before I came down. Alvarez and Slater have worked out some fancy way of beating the import duty. I dreamed up this gimmick with the picture and the police description, so I could get close to Alvarez in a hurry. It was taking a big chance, but it worked."

The two native cops stood still. One of them had both hands on Shayne's upper arm. The British sergeant looked at the redhead blankly, his mouth open.

"Are you trying to maintain that this was all a trick?"

"It didn't do any harm," Shayne said. "All it did was cost you some sleep. I still don't know much about this set-up, but I know a lot more than I did. For one thing, I know that Alvarez keeps his contraband in a locked wooden box in an air-space over the desk in his office. I was up there over your head when you were looking for me. I know how he makes contact with his couriers. I went along on a delivery. I couldn't have done any of this by barging into his office and showing him a private detective's license."

The sergeant closed his mouth with a snap. "I don't believe you."

"Is your name Brannon?"

"What of it?"

"How did you find out I was at the Pirate's Rendezvous? Somebody called you, right?" He quoted: "'I've got some information for you, and you can have it free because I want to pay off this guy.' Words to that effect."

Sergeant Brannon's face turned perceptibly redder. "That was you?"

"That was me," Shayne told him, watching the slowly reddening face. "I can't show you my credentials, because I don't have them. But would somebody who was really wanted by the cops call them and tell them where they could find him? And if you still don't believe me, put in a call to Miami. The head of the customs there is a man named Jack Malloy. Maybe you've heard of him. This is a big thing for Malloy, and he won't mind if you get him out of bed."

"And what is your real interest in this, Mr. Shayne?" Brannon said through stiff lips, apparently having difficulty pronouncing Shayne's name.

"Money," Shayne said promptly, because by this time any other answer would have been too complicated. "I'm shooting for the fifty thousand bucks."

"And you think—" Brannon said thickly, "you think you can walk into the British Commonwealth and defy established authority, flout and trick and trample on individual liberty, break laws right and left, the way you undoubtedly do at home? You think you can hoodwink Her Majesty's police, bring them out after midnight on a fool's errand, and come out of it unscathed? You are mistaken! You—are—very—much—mistaken!"

"Make up your mind," Shayne said. "Which would you rather do, yell at me, or catch a murderer?"

"I'll do a great deal more than yell at you!" Brannon yelled. "I'll put you in my most primitive cell and forget about you until somebody brings you officially to my attention! I think you have finally decided to tell me the truth. I think you are actually what you represent yourself to be—a cheap, money-grabbing, conscienceless private detective. I know all about your kind. But you may come to regret that it ever entered your mind to

play ducks and drakes with our backward little provincial constabulary. What you need is time for reflection, and I'm the man who can give it to you!"

Shayne, too, was beginning to get angry. "Did you ever hear of a writ of habeas corpus?"

"Often. You Americans stole it from us, you know. But I don't think it will apply in your case. We have arrested a notorious American fugitive, who is wanted for unlawful flight to evade prosecution, in the language of an apparently official circular we received through the usual channels. We will notify our American friends that we have captured you, and let them begin extradition proceedings. We will send off this notification the first thing tomorrow, as soon as the proper forms can be made out, by the slowest available boat. We will address it to the FBI, who won't have heard of your harmless little deception, will they? Oh, I foresee many interesting delays. You will have a marvelous opportunity to study the cracks in the ceiling of that cell."

"And while you're making your point," Shayne said, "what happens to the murderer of Albert Watts? It doesn't seem to me you were making much headway before I got here."

Brannon's flush deepened, if such a thing was possible. "We were making headway, in our slow, unspectacular, bumbling fashion. We will continue this process, without any help from American private detectives, eliminating one possibility at a time until only one is left and we are in a position to arrest and convict the killer."

"Sure," Shayne said sarcastically. "You'll go on working from nine to five, with an hour off for lunch and another in the afternoon for tea. Meanwhile the killer will be working overtime. If one of the Slaters gets hurt, you'll begin to feel a little more heat."

"Ah, the appeal to the American eagle," Brannon said. "I was waiting for that."

"Goddamn it," Shayne shouted, "can't you break out of the tired old routine for once? If Alvarez can't get Slater to talk, he'll go to work on Slater's wife. I had a small taste of the kid who's going to be putting on the pressure. He's a mental case. Nothing surprising about that—it's another form of routine. Doesn't it mean anything to you?"

"And after the various lies I've heard from you, why should I believe anything you tell me at this point, Shayne?"

"Why, you pompous little tinpot Napoleon! Just because something never happened to you before, you think it can't happen. Open your eyes to what's going on in the world! If you put me in jail I'm warning you—"

"That will be enough of that," Brannon snapped.

He signed to his men, who closed in on the redhead. Shayne's muscles were rigid. He stood rooted, staring into the British sergeant's eyes. Brannon returned the look contemptuously, and flicked again at his mustache.

Suddenly Shayne laughed.

"Is anything funny?" Brannon snarled. "Share it with me."

"I just remembered who you remind me of," Shayne said. "You wouldn't know him."

For some obscure reason he felt much better. Physically there was no resemblance between the two men, but in every other respect, he had realized suddenly, this British sergeant was much like Peter Painter, chief of detectives in Miami Beach, and a longtime adversary of Shayne's. After years of trial and error, Shayne had learned how to handle Painter. He had been in many tight squeezes, but Painter had never succeeded in besting him. And neither would Brannon, Shayne promised himself, in spite of the British accent, his immense assurance, his cops with their vehicles and their guns, not

to speak of the fact that he was operating on his home ground among friends, while Shayne was a stranger, as solitary as he had ever been in his life.

Meanwhile, there was no point in tangling with Brannon's men. He let them take him to the door. They walked him up the ramp and around the hotel, holding his arms in a professional grip, one hand above and one hand below the elbow, keeping the elbow locked. Brannon was a step or two behind, shining an electric torch on the path, his other hand resting on the butt of his revolver.

They had come in a four-door English Ford. Brannon passed the other to unlatch the rear door. This street, like most of those on St. Albans, had a high crown, but even so, Shayne thought, the car seemed to lean unnaturally far toward the sidewalk.

"Flat tire!" one of the native cops exclaimed.

Brannon muttered in annoyance. At that moment, Shayne heard a man's voice singing tipsily. Looking around, he saw a lanky figure wearing Bermuda shorts, a pipe clenched in the corner of his mouth, wobbling toward them on a bicycle which he seemed hardly able to control. As he passed under a street lamp, Shayne recognized him. It was the British anthropologist, Cecil Powys. He had some kind of long, clumsy object in the bicycle basket.

Shayne and the three policemen were a compact group, looking down at the flat tire. Powys' bicycle came faster and faster, the front wheel swinging violently from one side of the sidewalk to the other.

"Watch out!" the Englishman cried, appalled at what was about to happen.

Leaning far backward, his balance more and more uncertain, he closed his eyes and squeezed the hand brakes on the handlebars. The front wheel turned at right angles to the street, but as the brakes took hold it whipped

back around. The bike came abreast of Shayne and the three cops. Powys gave a drunken yell as the handlebars were wrenched out of his grip and the front wheel slammed headlong into Sergeant Brannon. The sergeant went down. His arms flailing, Powys pitched forward against one of the cops holding Shayne. The bike's pedal caught the other cop in the knees and dropped him. As he fell he carried Shayne down with him. Powys himself landed on top of the heap.

The bike ended upside down, its front wheel still spinning.

CHAPTER 9

Michael Shayne, twisting, grabbed at Sergeant Brannon's holster. The flap was unfastened and his fingers slid across the cold hardness of the pistol grip. He tugged at it, but it resisted. Apparently the holster had a safety catch that would release the pistol only when it was pulled at the proper angle.

Only one of the cops had kept his two-handed grip on Shayne's arm. The redhead bent his arm and drove the point of his elbow into the man's midriff, with the full weight of his body behind it. The cop grunted but still managed to hold on until Shayne pivoted on one knee, straightening his arm suddenly and swinging it upward in a half arc. The cop's grip broke. Shayne rolled and came to his feet, crouching.

Brannon was fumbling with the flap of his holster. Powys, drunk as a lord, lost his balance again and sprawled forward, arms and legs outflung, keeping the two cops out of action. So it was between Shayne and Brannon. The American threw a quick glance at the retaining wall, a dozen steps away. He could probably get over it before Brannon could draw and fire, but he didn't like the idea of being hunted through loose sand by three men with flashlights and guns. He stepped quickly around the tangle of arms and legs, going into position to deliver a quick kick at Brannon's head. But his foot struck the long object Powys had been carrying in his

basket, and without any conscious thought he instantly switched gears.

It was one of the murderous three-pronged spears carried by skin-divers. He snatched it up, stepping backward. With a quick pass of his right hand, he cocked it, and in the same movement he released the safety. Now the broad rubber bands that gave the weapon its hitting power were at full stretch. He held it lightly in both hands, aimed just above the group on the ground.

"Let the gun alone, Brannon," he said sharply.

The sergeant looked up at the vicious prongs, three feet from his head. Shayne grinned down at him wolfishly. The two cops ceased to struggle. Powys disentangled his long arms and legs; to Shayne's surprise the pipe was still firmly clenched in his mouth.

"Surely want to apologize," he said. "The confounded machine bolted on me. Anybody hurt except me?"

Shayne nudged the Englishman with his toe. "Get up. The rest of you stay where you are."

Powys rose unsteadily. "Nothing strenuous, if you don't mind, old chap. Perfectly sober and all that. I see you've got my spear. Quite right. Get it out of harm's way." Then he cried suddenly, peering owlshly at Shayne, "Great Scott, my dear chap! You've got it cocked!"

"Yeah, so I have," Shayne said. "Now reach down and pull the sergeant's gun out of its holster. Don't make any sudden moves. Just be slow and careful."

"Careful!" Powys said indignantly, suddenly sounding almost sober. "You're the one who'd better be careful."

Shayne made a small gesture with the spear, and the Englishman said hastily, "My God! Don't point it. You don't realize. That's for barracuda. Those prongs can go through a two-inch plank."

"Get the gun and give it to me," Shayne said. "I'm a little nervous, but I'll try not to pull the trigger."
"Point it higher, please! You don't aim the bloody thing like a rifle. It shoots low."

Watching Shayne fearfully over his shoulder, he bent down and tugged at the gun in Brannon's holster until he had worked it into position to come free. Holding it between thumb and forefinger, so Shayne would have no reason to think he was going to try to fire it, he handed it up to the redhead, who sent it spinning over the retaining wall into the sand.

"Now two more," Shayne said.

The Englishman disarmed the two other cops and Shayne disposed of their guns in the same fashion. He backed toward the bike until he could touch it with one foot. Very little time had elapsed; the front wheel was still revolving slowly.

"What do you hope to accomplish, Shayne?" Brannon demanded, recovering the use of his tongue. "You don't think you can get off the island before I catch up with you, do you?"

"I can try," Shayne said grimly, reaching down.

"Perhaps we might come to some compromise," Brannon said slowly. "I was a little hasty, I see that. Forget what I said about putting you in jail."

Holding the spear in one hand, Shayne set the bicycle upright and ran it forward and back to be sure it could still be ridden. One of the pedals ticked against the frame as it came around, but otherwise it seemed to be undamaged.

"There's probably a lot in some of the things you were saying," Brannon went on. "I'm sure the inspector wouldn't want to be disturbed."

"The inspector wouldn't want to be disturbed," Shayne said. "Nothing unusual has happened, after all, except that a man's been murdered. You remind me of a man who's been murdered."

more and more of that character I know in Miami Beach. He always begins to get reasonable when he realizes how dumb he's going to look."

He swung a long leg over the bike and settled down on the saddle. He hadn't ridden one of these things in years, and he hoped he remembered how. He gave the group near the car a long, deadly look, ready to swing the spear around if they made any move. Then he dropped the spear into the basket and pedaled hard for the corner.

Before he was halfway there he heard someone running behind him. He glanced around. Sergeant Brannon had set out in pursuit, knees high, arms pumping. He called out something. Shayne bent low over the handlebars and drove forward. In that one rapid glance at Brannon's straining face, he had seen that the sergeant was thinking of what his superiors would say when they found out that he had captured Shayne and let him get away. At that moment he was more afraid of ridicule than he was of being impaled on the spear.

For a moment, exerting himself to the utmost, Brannon gained on the American. Shayne knew there was a way to shift to a higher gear on these English bikes, but he couldn't waste any time learning the technique. He spun around the corner, narrowly missing the curb. With a despairing burst of speed, Brannon narrowed the gap to five or six feet. It was downhill now, and as the grade increased, Shayne began to pull away. The sergeant kept it up for another fifty yards, falling farther and farther behind. In desperation he picked up a stone and hurled it at Shayne. The redhead heard it clatter on the road.

"I'll get you—" Brannon shouted.

Shayne continued to pedal at top speed. When the grade leveled out he looked back, but the sergeant was

no longer within sight. He switched on the headlamp, found the gear-shift lever and changed sprockets. After that the pumping was easier.

He had already done all the thinking he had to do. It might have been an accident that Powys, drunk, should wobble up on a bicycle at that precise moment, but it hadn't been an accident that one of the tires on the cops' car was flat. Someone had let out the air, and there was no doubt in Shayne's mind that it was Powys. The redhead wanted to find out why; he needed all the help he could get.

When he came to a promising road on the outskirts of town he turned inland and began to climb. He shifted down into low again, and as the pitch increased he got off and pushed. Soon he was able to turn onto a dirt road paralleling the bay. He pedaled for five miles and turned back, taking the descent very fast. He came out on Bayview Road, only a few hundred yards from the Hibiscus Lodge. He approached carefully. Only one of the little cluster of cottages still had a light burning. Shayne switched off his headlamp.

As he glided to a stop at the gate, the front door opened and Powys looked out. "That you, Shayne?"

Shayne swung off the bike and propped it against the gate post. He was stiff and saddlesore.

"Make it a motorcycle next time. They're noisier, but they go faster. Brannon damned near caught me."

Powys laughed. Shayne limped up the path onto the porch. Powys was holding the door.

"You didn't mislay my fish-sticker, I hope?"

"No, it's out in the basket."

"Right. They cost a goodish bit of money, actually. I'll just put the bike undercover, in case we have a visitor in the shape of the good Sergeant Brannon. Make yourself a drink."

"Thanks," Shayne said. "I don't know about you—you were pretty stoned the last time I saw you."

"When I saw that spear pointed at my head I sobered up in a hurry."

He went out. The furniture was arranged in much the same way as in Shayne's own cottage. A bottle of Johnny Walker and several unopened splits of soda were set out on the coffee table beside the tape-recorder. Shayne poured some Scotch into a glass and sat down in an easy chair, stretching his legs.

When Powys came back Shayne said, "How about Brannon? Was it hard to persuade him the whole thing was a big mistake?"

"Damn hard." The Englishman's pipe had gone out. He tamped down the tobacco and lit a match. "But I'm well known to be somewhat eccentric. Balmy, you know, but harmless. He was too mad at you to be entirely rational. The tire, you know—I'm afraid that still sticks in his craw. That was a little too much. He's not a complete fool, and on the off-chance that he may still pop around to ask me what I was doing in front of the Half Moon in the first place, I think we'd better sit in the dark."

"All right with me," Shayne said.

Powys turned off the lamps, and Shayne heard him sit down. Another match flared, lighting up the Englishman's sad, bony face.

"And what *were* you doing in front of the Half Moon?" Shayne said.

"Ah, Mike. Mind if I call you Mike?"

"Go ahead."

"Let's put that question aside for the time being. What we have to determine, I take it, is where Alvarez has taken the Slaters."

Shayne was no longer surprised by anything Powys said. He sat forward.

ou've been sticking pretty close to me all day. You
t just happen to go bonefishing this morning—or
yesterday morning by now. You went so you could
an eye on me. You tailed me to the Camel's night-
b. When the cops were about to put me out of circu-
ion, you took care of it, and you did it very well. To a
ertain extent I have to trust you. But I'll feel more com-
ortable if I know your angle."

Even with the lights on, Shayne probably would hav
detected no change in the Englishman's expression.
His tone remained the same, casual and offhand.

"My—? Yes, I see what you mean. Why should a bloke
like me care who smuggles what, or who murdered my
insignificant compatriot Watts? Mike, I'm dreadfully
afraid I'm not free to tell you. Can't stop you from spec-
ulating, of course. I might be working for some kind of
a hush-hush outfit. These illegal trade routes are used
for other things besides goods, you know—agents, propa-
ganda. I'm not the cloak-and-dagger type, actually, but
you'd have no way of knowing that."

He thought a moment, and suggested. "Or I might be
working for the British diamond people. The London
syndicate is deeply pained—where it hurts, you know,
the pocketbook—by the known fact that illegal stor-
somehow find their way from the South African bla-
market to dealers in New York. Or it might be that
nothing but a student of human nature. Heaven kn-
I'm seeing quite a bit of it this evening. That last do-
sound too likely either, does it? My point is, do
matter?"

"Maybe not," Shayne said, drinking. "How di-
know you'd find me at the Half Moon?"

"It was really rather simple. As you surmised, m-
to the Pirate's Rendezvous this evening wasn't
anthropological in nature, although in point of

got some rather interesting material. I chiefly went to keep you company. You disappeared into the owner's office. Various people walked in and out, including a party of police, but you didn't appear again. When I investigated, I found that the office was empty. You had left by the window. That seemed to be that. I came back here, feeling disappointed and left out, and prepared to call it a night. Before long a car drove up and what did I see but Mike Shayne assisting the Camel himself into his cottage. The Camel seemed to be in a rather bad way. I nipped across to look in the window, and saw the Camel picking up the phone in your bedroom. Needless to say, I nipped right back. All our phones here are extensions of the one in the Lodge, so it was no trick at all to hear what he said. He mentioned the Half Moon as your destination, and as soon as you left, I set out after you on bicycle. I took the spear on the off-chance. Well, I saw two cars in front of the hotel and I pulled into the bushes to wait. I waited quite a time. Then there was a disturbance behind the hotel. Somebody whistled. The Camel and several others charged around the building. I heard what I thought was a shot."

"It was a shot," Shayne said grimly.

Powys went on, "The Camel and his men came out dragging Mrs. Slater. It was hard for me to see, but it didn't seem that you were with them. After that there were some very peculiar noises, as though some poor damned soul was beating his head against an oil drum from inside. Before I could investigate, the police arrived. I've never been fond of officials, of whatever stripe, and it gave me considerable amusement to let the air out of one of their tires. Then they marched you out, and I thought I should take a hand. Help yourself to the whisky."

Shayne felt carefully along the top of the coffee table

until his fingers fastened on the bottle. He uncapped it and poured by ear.

"You don't have any idea where this place in the country is?"

"Not the foggiest," Powys said cheerfully.

"You heard both ends of those phone calls. That was Slater's girl he was talking to, as you probably gathered. She did a lot of the talking. Did she—?"

The Englishman interrupted. "The easiest thing would be to see what you think yourself. I was mulling it over before you came. I'd just about put together a tentative conclusion, but I'd like to see if you concur. The fact of the matter is, as soon as the Camel started talking I thought I'd turn on the tape so I'd have a record of it, if it came to that."

Shayne's eyebrows rose in the darkness. "I'm glad we're working the same side of the street," he said with a short laugh. "I'd hate to have you for an enemy. Let's hear it."

"Strike a match, that's a good chap."

Shayne felt for his matches. He lit one on his thumbnail, and before it burned all the way down, the Englishman had found the spot on the tape where Alvarez, the phone in Shayne's bedroom off the hook, was telling the detective to go to the other room and bring him some ice cubes in a towel.

Shayne blew out the match and settled back. He heard the Camel give the operator a number.

"That's the nightclub, by the way," Powys put in.

A voice said hello. Apparently recognizing the voice, Alvarez began speaking in Spanish.

"Do you understand what he's saying?" Shayne asked.

Powys adjusted the volume and translated the quick flow of question and answer. "First of all, are the police

still there? Yes, he is told. One, posted at the front entrance. How about the people who were taken in for questioning? Have they returned? Only Al, whoever he is. An American. The police didn't want to take a chance on holding him longer. Then Alvarez says to bring Vivienne to the phone, and from now on it is in English."

He turned up the volume again. Shayne waited. There was a faint whirring sound from the machine.

A girl's voice came on, and before she had spoken a dozen words, he knew it was the French girl he had met at the Pirate's Rendezvous. He quickly fitted her into place beside Paul Slater. Alvarez had undoubtedly pulled those strings, arranging the connection so he could keep an eye on his courier and make sure he would be in need of money. Shayne, who made few moral judgments in this field, knew from his brief talk with her that she would be an expensive hobby for a man without much legitimate income.

That was all the rearranging he had time for before the Camel's voice was saying, "Are you alone? Is the door closed?"

"Yes, yes," the girl answered sulkily. "You understand that they have started my music. I must begin singing in one moment."

"Never mind that. When did you talk to Slater?"

"On the telephone, this afternoon for five minutes. His wife—"

"I know, I know. What did he tell you?"

"About what?"

The urgency in the Camel's tone came through clearly. "You know very well about what. You know that I have a business arrangement with this man. I received a notice in the mail setting a date for delivery—eleven o'clock tonight. When you talked to him he had already mailed the notice. He must have referred to it in some way."

"No," the girl's voice said, still sulky. "You do not tell me about times or deliveries or such stupid matters, and I wish to have nothing to do with that side of the affair. Nothing whatever, do you hear me? When you want me to ask him what he will be doing at eleven o'clock or something of the sort, tell me what I must ask and I will ask it."

"Why did he call you, then?"

"Oh, to warn me not to phone him at the hotel. His wife, you understand, had discovered about me and our meetings when she was gone. They had a great quarrel about it. He felt great remorse."

"Yes, yes," the Camel said. "But yesterday. Yesterday. I want to know his exact words. Did he say he had not decided? Or precisely what?"

Shayne had heard this question as he brought in the ice cubes and handed them to the Camel. From this point on, he had heard the Camel's end of the conversation. He leaned forward, intent on the girl's answer.

"He said he had decided to give it up," she said. "It is finished. What happened the last trip frightened him severely, so no more dealings with that devil Alvarez. I sighed and told him this was bad news, I must consider how I am to live. You told me to make it clear, and so I made it clear. It is connected, the business with you and the pleasure with me, although I think sometimes it is not such a great pleasure to him, after all. And it is only common sense. If he gives up making money, he must give up seeing me. I spoke to him of another American, who unhappily lives only in my imagination—fat, bald, with much money. This man Paul does not like. Nor do I, to speak the truth."

"And in the end? How did you leave it? You persuaded him?"

"No, no. There wasn't time. I did the best I could. In another hour's time he would have promised anything, though whether he would keep this promise is yet another matter. He is not exactly the Rock of Gibraltar, Paul. But I have no chance to get even a promise. The phone rings. Brring! His wife has returned. She is downstairs in the lobby. I must dash about here and there, picking up clothes, shoes. It is like a comedy on the stage, though I am the only one of the two of us who thinks it is funny. For Paul it is most extremely serious. This wife of his must be truly *formidable*. I assure you, with my dress half on, in only one shoe, with the fearful Mrs. Slater entering the elevator, I did not ask him if he had changed his mind and would handle one more shipment for you. This would be much to expect, Luis."

"All right, I understand that. Still, you had a feeling that he would go ahead with it as planned? This is important. I must know exactly."

The reels revolved in silence for a moment. The girl's voice said reluctantly, "I wish very much to have the commission you promise me. So of course I wish that Paul would not be such a great fool. Why he is so frightened, I do not see. But I must not seem to care too greatly, or I will lose him. He is a complicated one, our Paul. Before our tête-à-tête is brought to a sudden halt, I think he is convinced at last that if he must choose, he will choose Vivienne Larousse, lately of Paris, France. He knows this is possible only if he has money to spend, and he has no rich uncle who is likely to die in the future, I believe. As I hop out the door with zipper unzipped, one shoe off, one shoe on, I am giggling. Now I have him in my pocket, now he will do as Uncle Luis wants, he will make money, he will give it to me, not to that dried up stick of a wife. But then I think some

re. He is in confusion, this young man. One can turn
n easily. And Martha Slater had him all night, all
orning. Perhaps she used different methods from me,
ut perhaps not, do you know? And now I think that
perhaps you and I should both look for someone new."
Alvarez made a noncommittal sound. "And today on
he phone?"

"It was nothing. He babbled about his wife, she
worked so hard, she stuck to him and he was worth noth-
ing—all very boring. He said nothing about you or your
affair. I am surprised, you know, that he had arranged
to meet you."

Shayne went on listening to the exchange between the
Camel and the girl, but his mind was no longer on it.
The Englishman's pipe had gone out again; another
match flared in the darkness. The Camel cut the con-
versation off abruptly when he learned that Slater was
leaving St. Albans, and asked for another number.

"Need any more, Mike?" Powys said quietly.

"I guess not," Shayne told him.

The Englishman sat forward and turned off the ma-
chine. For a moment they sat in silence.

Shayne said, "I think I'd better have a talk with the
girl."

"My idea exactly," Powys said. "I was thinking
might be interesting to have a whack at her myself. I
her performance—quite educational, actually. But you
the logical man. Wasn't she the one you were dan-
cing with?"

"She was doing the dancing," Shayne said. "I
gave her moral support. Too bad you don't have
Brannon's probably shown my picture to all the ca-
pers who are still working."

"More than likely. But we are going to need

Mike." He struck a match. He seemed to be having a hard time getting his pipe to draw. "Stay where you are. I'll run out and steal one."

He is in confusion, this young man. One can turn easily. And Martha Slater had him all night, all day. Perhaps she used different methods from me, perhaps not, do you know? And now I think that perhaps you and I should both look for someone new." Alvarez made a noncommittal sound. "And today on the phone?"

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CHAPTER 10

Michael Shayne smoked a cigarette sitting in the dark on the Englishman's front steps. When he heard a crunch of tires on the gravel, he gulped the last of his drink and put the glass on a window sill. Powys was driving without lights. He coasted to a stop at the garage, and Shayne got in.

"Nice little Morris," Powys said with satisfaction. "Amazing how easy it is to steal a car. Never did it before. I think it belongs to Miss Trivers, so let's try not to get any bullet holes in it."

He kept the lights off until they were a quarter of a mile from the Lodge. Then he decided not to run the risk of going through the town. Once again Shayne circled St. Albans on back roads.

"Don't forget there's a cop in front of the place," Shayne reminded him.

"Never fear, never fear. That man is very much on my mind."

They came in through the straggly unpaved streets of the Old Town. "Everybody asleep," Powys observed. "Wouldn't mind being asleep myself."

They passed through the native market. After rejecting several possible parking places, Powys parked on a steep street beside the old church.

"I'll look the situation over. Back in a tick." He glanced at Shayne as he got out. "Pity you're so big, Mike. And that red hair. There's no getting around it, you don't look much like a tourist."

He latched the door softly and disappeared. They were several blocks from the nightclub district; Shayne could see the fitful reflections from the big electric signs, which would go on blinking for another few hours. He heard a goombay band, perhaps playing in the Pirate's Rendezvous. Beginning to feel trapped in the little car, he got out and stood waiting for Powys in the side doorway of the church. After a time he saw the Englishman coming up toward him rapidly. Seeing Shayne, Powys signaled. He turned and started back in the direction he had come. Shayne followed, keeping close to shop-fronts.

Powys stopped at the entrance to a narrow cobbled alley. "You'd better go in through the back," he said as Shayne came up to him. "I couldn't make out what kind of guard they have on the door, but with all those pretty gels in the floorshow, they must have something. I'll pave the way. Another sudden attack of drunkenness is called for, I'm afraid. I'll have quite a reputation before the night's over."

He nodded and plunged into the alley. At the next intersection he looked around the corner with care, and walked briskly across. A car went by. The instant Shayne heard the sound of the approaching motor he dived for a shadow and pressed hard against a damp wall. He waited until the car was well out of the neighborhood before he continued to the corner. Powys, across the street, waved jauntily. Without waiting for Shayne, he turned into the continuation of the alley. Shayne crossed the street at a run and saw Powys going up a short flight of steps that led into one of the buildings, probably the one that held the nightclub. The goombay band was resting between numbers, but even without the music there were muffled indications that the building was alive.

The Englishman's walk suddenly became lurching and

ordinated. He was gone by the time Shayne had looked into a long hall, poorly lit by a single watt bulb. Powys was dancing solemnly with an old woman, who had apparently been watching the r. Shayne grinned. This was clearly a dance step of Englishman's invention, a weird combination of a cha-cha and a waltz. He held her in both arms, whirling her around and around while she shrieked with laughter and tried to push him away. He danced backward into an open doorway, looking down at her with his owlish solemnity. Shayne heard him say, "My good woman, you dance superbly."

The redhead slipped past. Glancing to the left at the end of the hall, he saw a stove and a man in a chef's hat, and heard the clatter of dishes. He turned right. A moment later he found himself at the foot of a steep iron staircase. Sticking a cigarette in his mouth, he looked around. A man in the costume worn by the orchestra came through a doorway mopping his forehead. A drum began to beat slowly.

"Where's Vivienne?" Shayne asked casually. "Working," the man told him, without giving Shayne a second glance. "Her dressing room upstairs. First door."

Shayne thanked him and went up. This part of the building, which the public never entered, was in a state of repair. The paint was peeling, the floors were dirty. He stood aside on the landing to let a dancer by. She was barefooted, and wasn't wearing much in way of a costume. The first door at the top of the stairs was unmarked and without a latch. Shayne pushed open and went in.

It was little more than a large closet. An unmarked bulb was burning above a make-up table with a specked mirror. Clothes were thrown carelessly

back of a chair. A small window that looked out on the alley was open as far as it would go, but the air in the room was heavy with the smell of cosmetic preparations and stale tobacco smoke.

Shayne lit his cigarette and made a quick survey of the room. One of the several dresses hanging along one wall had a Paris label, a sign that he was in the right place. He opened a small trunk and found it filled with a jumble of costumes. He continued around the room, his deeply trenched face clearly showing his distaste for the job. He almost missed the small purse on the dressing table, amid a litter of jars and tubes and crumpled tissues. He cleared a space on the table and turned it inside out.

Below, the drum-beat had quickened. Shayne disregarded the few coins, the hairpins, lipstick and eye-tools. There were several torn scraps of newspaper and a folded letter. The drum-beat was now very fast; the girl's number must be nearing its climax. He pulled the letter out of the soiled envelope and read it quickly. It was on a letterhead of the American consul, addressed to Mlle. Vivienne Larousse at a St. Albans hotel. In stiff official language it listed the conditions under which French citizens could be assigned a quota number for permanent admission to the United States. Mlle. Larousse's chances, the consul seemed to feel, were not good.

Shayne thrust the letter back and picked up the newspaper clippings. The lines on his face deepened. They were radio schedules, like the one he had found in the Camel's desk, and a light pencil-line had been drawn in the same way around several listings. The drummer in the main room of the nightclub was slapping his drum with mounting frenzy. He beat out a complicated series of rhythms in a final excited flurry, and there was

upt burst of applause. Shayne swept the assortment of objects back into the purse. Before he snapped looked at the radio schedules again. One of the circles had been drawn around the six o'clock on Wednesday in the previous week. That was the moment when Albert Watts had locked his travel agency and walked off toward the bay, not to be seen again alive.

Closing the purse with a snap, Shayne stepped back against the opposite wall. His eyes were bleak. The crowd continued to applaud, and mixed with the clapping there were a few drunken shouts. Gradually the noise died. A moment or two later, Shayne heard the click of high heels on the iron steps. The door opened.

In addition to high-heeled slippers, all she seemed to be wearing was a light cotton wrap, which she wasn't bothering to hold together. When Shayne had seen her earlier that evening, her face had been alert and interested. Her eyes had been alive. Now, coming into a mean, sordid room where she believed herself to be alone, her face sagged and was without luster. She seemed years older. Sitting down at the dressing table, she leaned forward to look without pleasure at her reflection in the mirror. She had reached up to take off her eyelash when she saw Shayne.

"Hi," he said.

She whirled. Her eyes were wide with shock. "Now take it easy," Shayne said. "I just want to you a couple of questions."

She wet her lips and took a deep breath, pulling wrapper across her breast. "Mr. Shayne. You gave bad moment, do you realize that?"

"Sorry. I didn't think I ought to walk in here brass band." He pulled the trunk out from the wardrobe and sat down. "How was the show? You got a nice h

Some of her quick expressiveness came back to her face. "It was not too bad. But this last show is difficult, after midnight. All the undrunken ones have gone home, and the pigs who remain—I feel that we have been wallowing all of us in the same sty. It will be hours before I can sleep."

"Maybe you ought to go into some other business."

She gave him an angry look. "Unhappily, I have never learned to operate a typewriter. I do not wish to be a clerk in a store. That is not my talent. But I begin to think I have been wrong. I am a third-rate artist and such I shall always be. And yet, here in this third-rate place, is it possible to be anything else? If I stay here much longer, I predict what will happen. One night after this last show, I will come up here and I will not have the courage to look myself in the face, which is necessary to change my make-up. And I will shoot myself."

"I doubt if you'll do that, baby," Shayne said. "Not so long as half the population of the world is male. You may not make it in show business, but I think you'll make it."

She gave him a suspicious look. "This I hope is a compliment."

"Have the cops been bothering you?"

She made a scornful sound. "I am not bothered by flies, of any nation. Somebody told them you and I danced together, so they asked me questions. They showed me a picture. It was bad, very fuzzy, on one of those little police placards. I did not recognize it. And you? Did you see the Camel?"

"Yeah, I saw him," Shayne said. "It seemed to me we were getting to be pretty good friends, but then we had an argument and now I don't think he likes me."

"Then I am sorry. I do not like you either."

not that simple. All I want from you is a little information. He won't know I've been here unless you tell

and why should I not tell him? I dislike this job of every much, but I would dislike even more to be without. In three weeks' time, I would be deported." Didn't you say something about wanting to go to America?"

A gleam appeared in her eye. She turned toward him a little, moving the chair so her wrapper opened. "Are you going to take me?" Shayne grinned. "Don't waste it on me. Your best bet is still Paul Slater."

A wrinkle sprang up between her eyes. "What do you know about Paul Slater?" "Quite a bit, baby. I made friends with the night clerk at the Half Moon. He didn't know your name but he could describe you. Before he was finished the poor guy was drooling. It seems you've been coming there to see Slater."

She thought a moment. "I would like a cigarette, please."

He took out his pack, shook out a cigarette for her and held the match. She put her hand on his wrist as she took the light, then breathed out smoke slowly and looked up at him through her long artificial eyelashes.

"The Camel always keeps a supply of gasoline on board. I know where to get more. Do you know boats?" "I know boats," Shayne said, "but I don't know water around here. And you can't get a nightclub in the States unless you come in legally."

She laughed bitterly. "If I put my name on tonight, now, perhaps there will be a place for me when I'm eighty-nine. Of course I can always meet some American and become married. Then there will

Alvarez could hold him was by threatening to kill him later fell for it."

"Don't fool yourself," she said. "If Luis Alvarez say something of that nature, he will do it."

Shayne laughed. "It's an act, honey. He's a big frog, but it's not much of a puddle. Back home we drink like that out for coffee. The point is, where is he? It's a country place, half an hour by taxicab to the airport. I can't spend my time ringing doorbells to show up before anybody gets hurt." He looked at him speculatively. "And you think she'll jump into your arms?"

"Just might," Shayne said briefly. "Even if she isn't tender-hearted where this blonde is concerned. I don't want any of those creeps to shove her around, but she's mad at Paul. First on account of you because he got her into this mess. Who knows what she'll cry on my shoulder, and we'll get to talking all the time. One thing leads to another, and she'll lie-boy the boot. It could happen."

"That's why you came here, when the police are looking for you?"

"I don't know they were looking for me," Shayne said. "I'm on the doll, but not that gone. How about this country. Do you know where it is?"

"I don't know so," she said. "But I have not yet decided to go. If something goes wrong, and the Camel comes, I was talking to you—"

"I don't know," Shayne said patiently, "he thinks the cops are looking for me. When I turn up, the whole thing is going to be a big surprise. Why should he connect me with anything?"

Shayne made a gesture toward the wretched little room. "I am sick to death of all this! It is only a matter of time."

a tiny chance, I know that, and I am a fool to take it. But I am sick of the Camel, too, if you wish to know. First tell me. Is it true that Paul hit him with a wrench?"

"Somebody did. He thinks it was Paul."

She shook her head. "It is a side of Paul I have not seen. Yes, I think I will take this chance, like a fool. You have a car?"

Shayne nodded. In a rush, as though to get it out before she changed her mind, she said, "Go out of town toward the north. Drive ten, twelve kilometers. You will come to a crossroads, the main road across the island. Turn left. Now another fifteen kilometers. It is a new house on a mountain. Many windows. The sign at the turn says—" She thought a moment. "P. Smith. Or perhaps another initial. I remember a single initial, then the name Smith." She added, reminiscently, "The pig."

Shayne repeated the directions, hoping the turns would be easy to find in the dark. She stood up and put a hand on his shoulder.

"There will be others besides Alvarez there. Four, I think. Take care of yourself. It would be too bad if something happened to you."

"I agree with you," Shayne said. "Thanks, baby. I'll be careful going out."

Her hand slid along his upper arm. She was being very careless with the wrapper.

"Do you know," she said, "if the virtuous Mrs. Slater decides to remain true to her husband, you could do worse than come for me."

Shayne grinned and shook his head. "Uh-uh. I think you'll make some lucky man a nice wife, but I know too much about you."

She came even closer to him. Her lips were parted, and her perfume overcame the other smells in the room. In a low husky whisper she said, "Forget."

Shayne felt behind him for the doorknob. "You've made your point. Don't push it. I've got just one more question. Did you ever run into a guy named Albert Watts?"

Her eyes changed slightly.

"You recognize the name?" Shayne said, improvising quickly. "Good. I heard tonight that Watts was the one who tipped off the customs on Slater. I might be able to use this with Martha. Besides being a Casanova and a smuggler, what if he's a killer? I'll be careful with it, because it's the sort of thing that can boomerang. If you don't feel like answering, say so."

She shrugged. "It was nothing. Six months or so ago, Paul asked me to become friendly with this man. It was arranged that we meet by chance. I was charming as always, but he put his tail between his legs and ran. Paul laughed about it. He said I frightened the poor man." She smiled up at Shayne. "But how could that be?"

Shayne said, "Paul didn't bring it up again?"

"No. The next time I heard the name, someone said he was killed in a quarrel of some kind. I am only interested in living people. That is all? Then I think I must give you one kiss before you go."

She came up on her toes. Her hands slipped around his body, inside his coat. Her fingers were on the overlapping layers of adhesive tape beneath his shirt.

It isn't necessary to be a private detective to have an accident requiring that kind of bandage. It can happen to anybody, even to the hoodlum Shayne was pretending to be. But for some reason that little touch was all the girl needed. A spark flared in her eyes.

She said coldly, "So the Camel thinks the police have got you? And I see that they have not. Does that mean you are a policeman yourself?"

Shayne snorted. "Do I look like a cop?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "Little things have made me wonder about you, and all at once I think that is just what you look like, a cop."

She glanced at the door, then whirled and ran to the little window. He caught her in two strides and clapped a hand over her mouth before she could make any noise. His other arm was around her waist. She struggled against him, throwing herself from side to side. She had a dancer's body—smooth and controlled. She tried to bite his hand, but he was gripping her too tightly.

After a moment she stopped resisting. He kept his hand over her mouth.

"If you're going to start using your head this late in the day," he said, "really use it. I'm a private detective. I faked up that flier the cops showed you. They had their hands on me tonight but I got away. I made them look a little stupid. That's something no cop likes, I don't care who he is. So I'm in the middle."

She tried to speak.

"No, listen to me," Shayne went on. "If I let you yell out the window, do you really think there's anybody here who can stop me? Don't be stupid. All that would happen is that the Camel would know you gave me directions. It wouldn't matter to him who you thought you were talking to. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

After a second he felt her nod.

"All right. I'll let you go now, but if you make a move in any direction I'll forget it's bad manners to slug a lady."

He took his hand from her mouth first. When she made no attempt to yell he released her. She whirled, pulling the wrapper together, and looked at him defiantly. Her lipstick was badly smeared.

"Get out of here!" she cried.

"You mean you've stopped wanting to kiss me?"

She glared at him, but in another second she smiled slightly. "I didn't say that. I said to get out of here."

"Maybe I'd better tie you up before I go," Shayne said. "Alvarez may have a phone at that place of his. I wouldn't want you to tell him I'm coming."

She flared up again. "Try it! You will have a fight on your hands, Michael Shayne!"

Shayne laughed. "I think I could win it, but somebody might come in and untie you." He studied her. "O.k., baby, get some clothes on."

"I hope you don't think I'm going with you?"

"That's exactly what I think," Shayne said, becoming completely serious. "It's the only way you can get off the hook. Do it right and the Camel won't know you helped me. Slater won't be any good to you dead. If I get him out of there in one piece, you can claim all the credit for it. Maybe he'll be grateful."

She said suspiciously, "Who is paying you?"

"Mrs. Slater," Shayne answered impatiently. "It's also true that because she's an old friend of mine she isn't paying me much. And there's one thing I didn't mention. I have a tape of a phone conversation between you and the Camel earlier tonight. You were a little cold-blooded at a couple of points there, I thought. It might hurt Paul's feelings if he heard it."

"You wouldn't—"

"It would be a dirty trick, wouldn't it?" Shayne said. "It might even give him the idea that you don't really love him."

"So," she said after a pause. "Since you ask me so nicely, I will get dressed. Turn around, please."

"Turn around, hell," Shayne said. "And get a knife between my shoulder blades?"

She stared at him for a moment, then laughed. "In some ways you are rather impressive, you know?"

"Come on, come on," Shayne said. "We don't have all the time in the world."

He put another cigarette in his mouth as she shrugged out of her wrapper.

CHAPTER 11

She chose the dress with the Paris label. It was simple and black, and fitted her exactly. Shayne was in a position to know how much she was wearing in addition to the dress, and he felt she was somewhat under-clothed, even for this warm climate.

She stepped into her high-heeled shoes, and then was ready for her face. As she worked Shayne became more and more impatient. She left the full theatrical make-up on her eyes, giving most of her attention to her mouth.

"Better?" she asked, looking around.

"Fine, fine," Shayne growled. "Let's get going."

He was waiting at the door. She picked up her purse, gave her reflection one last glance, and did something more to her hair.

"I don't know why I have decided to trust you," she said, giving him an upward glance through the long eyelashes.

"I do," he said. "Because I've got the tape of that phone call stashed away in a safe place. Any monkey business going downstairs and you're dead with Slater."

"Don't threaten me, Michael," she said, smiling. "And to show you we are friends—" She went to the trunk and opened it. After tumbling the costumes around for a moment, she came up with a battered man's hat. "Put this on. I have a song I sing sometimes in a tramp costume—not at the Pirate's Rendezvous, of course; here they care only for what goes on beneath the cos-

turne. It is too large for me," she added unnecessarily.

It was too large for Shayne, he found after he had punched it into shape and put it on. She giggled.

He let her go first. She looked down the stairs and along the corridor. Turning, she beckoned. They met no one on the stairs. At the bottom, as she turned into the corridor, she called a gay greeting to someone, and Shayne pulled down the brim of the grotesque hat. He had his hand to his cigarette, screening the lower part of his face, as he passed a Negro porter leaning on a broom. The man looked at him curiously, and Shayne replaced his usual vigorous step with a spiritless shuffle. The old woman at the door was drowsing over an American movie magazine. Shayne went by with his head down, his hand still at his mouth.

Vivienne was waiting in the alley. She took his arm possessively, hugging it to her breast.

"Where is the car, cheri?"

Without answering, Shayne took her along the alley and up the steep street to the church. The Morris was parked where he had left it. Cecil Powys was behind the wheel.

"Mike," he said as Shayne opened the door for the girl. "This is a pleasant surprise."

"I knew you'd appreciate it," Shayne said. "She's going along to show us the way. I also want her where I can keep my eye on her."

"That shouldn't be at all difficult," the Englishman said cordially.

She gave him an interested look, shooting from behind the eyelashes as she had done with Shayne. The redhead got in back; she stayed in front so she could call the turns. Powys, sitting sideways in the driver's seat, seemed in no hurry to get under way.

"I enjoyed your performance," he said to the girl. "Frightfully good, really. When you were doing these

convolutions to the drum, the thought crossed my mind how jolly nice it would be to go backstage and make your acquaintance. Then I thought to myself, 'Impossible, old boy. Can't be done. Girl like that must have scads of admirers. Probably a jealous husband somewhere in the background.' "

He beamed at her. Shayne said brusquely, "His name is Cecil Powys. He claims to be working for a degree at Oxford, but don't ask him what he's really up to because he won't tell you. Now let's get going."

"Oh, come now," Powys said mildly, looking around. "It's not all that bad. I say—where did you get that awful hat?"

"You mean you just noticed it?"

Shayne laughed and put the hat on the seat beside him. Powys started the motor, swinging around the block to keep from passing the nightclub's front entrance. Soon, following the girl's directions, they were out of town tooling along the coast road at the little car's top speed. Occasionally Powys turned his head to smile appreciatively at the girl beside him. She was a girl who liked to be appreciated. She slid closer until their shoulders touched.

"Now to the left," she said after a time.

They started inland. Shayne leaned forward.

"I keep thinking of more things I want to ask you. When Martha was going out of town and Paul wanted to make a date with you, didn't he have some way of sending you a message so it wouldn't mean anything to anybody else? Wouldn't it be a good idea, for instance, to tear the radio program out of a paper and—"

She swung around, and Shayne said, "That's right. I looked through your bag. I didn't have anything else to occupy my time. Those were from Paul?"

She hesitated. "I see no reason not to tell you. Yes."

"You've been with him a lot lately. By this time you probably know most of his secrets. The customs people think he fooled them on his last trip. Do you know how he did it?"

Powys, his pipe clenched between his teeth, was holding the steering wheel lightly, intent on the road. His grip seemed to tighten, and Shayne felt a sharpening of attention.

Vivienne said carelessly, "I do not concern myself."

Shayne made a rude noise. "The hell you don't, baby. It wouldn't surprise me if even Alvarez doesn't know exactly how he works. But I'd be damn surprised if you don't."

She smiled in the faint light. "But you know, all this trouble may bring him together with his wife again. And if that happens, I might want to talk to the American officials in person. They pay well for such information, I am told."

"Now that's the spirit I like to see," Powys said.

When she looked at him to see if he was joking, he winked at her broadly. Shayne sat back.

"Now you must go more slowly," Vivienne said soon afterward, peering at the road ahead. "It is not far away."

Powys cut his speed while the girl watched for landmarks. They passed several large plantations, and went on climbing. They left a small sleeping village behind. In the end, though they were all watching for the turn, they missed it. Powys had to stop and back. It was a small sign: *R. Smith*, with an arrow pointed up a gravel road. At a quiet word from the girl, Powys cut his lights. He waited briefly until his eyes came into the new focus, then ground forward slowly in second. The dark vegetation on each side made the road easy to follow.

"Not far," the girl said.

Soon Shayne made out a massive stone wall on their left, about as high as a professional basketball center taking a rebound.

"I remember something," Vivienne said suddenly. "Wait. When the gate opens, a bell rings at the house."

"Easy enough," Powys said. "We go over the wall, eh, Mike?"

He spotted a break in the vegetation. Coming to a halt, he got out to try the ground. Satisfied, he returned to the Morris, cut the wheels sharply, and backed off the road as far as he could, stopping only when the rear wheels began to spin. He killed the motor and set the emergency. All three then set to work breaking branches to conceal the little car.

"What do you think about our mademoiselle?" Powys said. "Can we count on her not to drive away and leave us?"

"Sure," Shayne replied with a grin. "I convinced her. And just to be on the safe side, let's take the keys."

"You don't mean you are going to leave me here in the jungle!" she exclaimed. "All by myself?"

"We'll be back."

"Michael!" she said pleadingly. "You don't know what you are saying. There are wild animals."

"If I worried about anybody," Shayne said, "I'd be worrying about the animals."

"It is nothing to joke about!"

Powys laughed, but then said seriously, "No, you're right. Get in the car and run up the windows. Then even the snakes can't get in."

"Snakes!" she said in horror. "You, you—you—"

He held the branches aside for her. After she was in the car, he let them fall back in place. "All right?"

Her voice seemed small and far away. "But for the love of God, hurry."

"All the same," he said in a low voice to Shayne,

did you come to know about it—and about the bumping-off conversation?"

"Miss Lawson told me."

"The sly old pussy cat!" He looked, I thought, just a shade disturbed. "She doesn't like me and she doesn't like Theresa," he said presently. "You don't think—she's got anything more up her sleeve?"

"What could she have?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's just that she strikes me as a malicious old devil." He paused. "She hates Theresa..." he added.

"Did you know, Mr. Arundell, that Dr. Tanios came down to see your aunt on the Sunday before she died?"

"What—on the Sunday that we were there?"

"Yes. You did not see him?"

"No. We were out for a walk in the afternoon. I suppose he must have come then. Funny that Aunt Emily didn't mention his visit. Who told you?"

"Miss Lawson."

"Lawson again? She seems to be a mine of information."

He paused and then said: "You know, Tanios is a nice fellow. I like him. Such a jolly, smiling chap."

"He has an attractive personality, yes," said Poirot. Charles rose to his feet.

"If I'd been him I'd have murdered the dreary Bella years ago! Doesn't she strike you as the type of woman who is marked out by fate to be a victim? You know, I should never be surprised if bits of her turned up in a trunk at Margate or somewhere!"

"It is not a pretty action that you attribute there to her husband the good doctor," said Poirot severely.

"No," said Charles meditatively. "And I don't think really that Tanios would hurt a fly. He's much too kind-hearted."

"And what about you? Would you do murder if it were made worth your while?"

Charles laughed—a ringing, genuine laugh.

"Thinking about a spot of blackmail, M. Poirot? Nothing doing. I can assure you that I didn't put"—he

stopped suddenly and then went on—"strychnine in Aunt Emily's soup."

With a careless wave of his hand he departed.

"Were you trying to frighten him, Poirot?" I asked. "If so, I don't think you succeeded. He showed no guilty reactions whatsoever."

"No?"

"No. He seemed quite unruffled."

"Curious that pause he made," said Poirot.

"A pause?"

"Yes. A pause before the word 'strychnine.' Almost as though he had been about to say something else and thought better of it."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"He was probably thinking of a good, venomous-sounding poison."

"It is possible. It is possible. But let us set off. We will, I think, stay the night at The George in Market Basing."

Ten minutes later saw us speeding through London, bound once more for the country.

We arrived in Harchester about four o'clock and made our way straight to the offices of Purvis, Purvis, Charlesworth and Purvis.

Mr. Purvis was a big, solidly built man with white hair and a rosy complexion. He had a little the look of a country squire. His manner was courteous but reserved.

He read the letter we had brought and then looked at us across the top of his desk. It was a shrewd look and a somewhat searching one.

"I know you by name, of course, M. Poirot," he said politely. "Miss Arundell and her brother have, I gather, engaged your services in this matter, but exactly in what capacity you propose to be of use to them I am at a loss to imagine."

"Shall we say, Mr. Purvis, a fuller investigation of all the circumstances?"

The lawyer said drily: "Miss Arundell and her

brother have already had my opinion as to the legal position. The circumstances were perfectly clear and admit of no misrepresentation."

"Perfectly, perfectly," said Poirot quickly. "But you will not, I am sure, object to just repeating them so that I can envisage the situation clearly."

The lawyer bowed his head.

"I am at your service."

Poirot began :

"Miss Arundell wrote to you giving you instructions on the seventeenth of April, I believe?"

Mr. Purvis consulted some papers on the table before him.

"Yes, that is correct."

"Can you tell me what she said?"

"She asked me to draw up a will. There were to be legacies to two servants and to three or four charities. The rest of her estate was to pass to Wilhelmina Lawson absolutely."

"You will pardon me, Mr. Purvis, but you were surprised?"

"I will admit that—yes, I was surprised."

"Miss Arundell had made a will previously?"

"Yes, she had made a will five years ago."

"That will, after certain small legacies, left her property to her nephew and nieces?"

"The bulk of her estate was to be divided equally between the children of her brother Thomas and the daughter of Arabella Biggs, her sister."

"What has happened to that will?"

"At Miss Arundell's request I brought it with me when I visited her at Littlegreen House on April 21st."

"I should be much obliged to you, Mr. Purvis, if you would give me a full description of everything that occurred on that occasion."

The lawyer paused for a minute or two. Then he said, very precisely :

"I arrived at Littlegreen House at three o'clock in the afternoon. One of my clerks accompanied me. Miss Arundell received me in the drawing-room."

"How did she look to you?"

"She seemed to me in good health in spite of the fact that she was walking with a stick. That, I understand, was on account of a fall she had recently. Her general health, as I say, seemed good. She struck me as slightly nervous and over-excited in manner."

"Was Miss Lawson with her?"

"She was with her when I arrived. But she left us immediately."

"And then?"

"Miss Arundell asked me if I had done what she had asked me to do, and if I had brought the new will with me for her to sign."

"I said I had done so. I—er—" He hesitated for a minute or two, then went on stiffly: "I may as well say that, as far as it was proper for me to do so, I remonstrated with Miss Arundell. I pointed out to her that this new will might be regarded as grossly unfair to her family who were, after all, her own flesh and blood."

"And her answer?"

"She asked me if the money was or was not her own to do with as she liked. I replied that certainly that was the case. 'Very well then,' she said. I reminded her that she had known this Miss Lawson a very short time, and I asked her if she was quite sure that the injustice she was doing to her own family was legitimate. Her reply was, 'My dear friend, I know perfectly what I am doing.'"

"Her manner was excited, you say."

"I think I can definitely say that it was, but understand me, M. Poirot, she was in full possession of her faculties. She was in every sense of the word fully competent to manage her own affairs. Though my sympathies are entirely with Miss Arundell's family, I should be obliged to maintain that in any court of law."

"That is quite understood. Proceed. I pray of you."

"Miss Arundell read through her existing will. Then she stretched out her hand for the one I had had drawn up. I may say that I would have preferred to submit a draft first, but she had impressed upon me that the will

must be brought her ready to sign. That presented no difficulties as its provisions were so simple. She read it through, nodded her head, and said she would sign it straightaway. I felt it my duty to enter one last protest. She heard me out quite patiently, but said that her mind was quite made up. I called in my clerk and he and the gardener acted as witnesses to her signature. The servants, of course, were ineligible owing to the fact that they were beneficiaries under the will."

"And afterwards, did she entrust the will to you for safe-keeping?"

"No, she placed it in a drawer of her desk, which drawer she locked."

"What was done with the original will? Did she destroy it?"

"No, she locked it away with the other."

"After her death, where was the will found?"

"In that same drawer. As executor I had her keys and went through her papers and business documents."

"Were both wills in the drawer?"

"Yes, exactly as she had placed them there."

"Did you question her at all as to the motive for this rather surprising action?"

"I did. But I got no satisfactory answer. She merely assured me that 'she knew what she was doing.'"

"Nevertheless you were surprised at the proceeding?"

"Very surprised. Miss Arundell, I should say, had always shown herself to have a strong sense of family feeling."

Poirot was silent a minute, then he asked :

"You did not, I suppose, have any conversation with Miss Lawson on the subject?"

"Certainly not. Such a proceeding would have been highly improper."

Mr. Purvis looked scandalized at the mere suggestion.

"Did Miss Arundell say anything to indicate that Miss Lawson knew that a will was being drawn in her favour?"

"On the contrary. I asked her if Miss Lawson was aware of what was being done, and Miss Arundell snapped out that she knew nothing about it."

"It was advisable, I thought, that Miss Lawson should not be aware of what had happened. I endeavoured to hint as much and Miss Arundell seemed quite of my opinion."

"Just why did you stress that point, Mr. Purvis?"

The old gentleman returned his glance with dignity.

"Such things, in my opinion, are best undiscussed. Also it might have led to future disappointment."

"Ah!" Poirot drew a long breath. "I take it that *you thought it probable that Miss Arundell might change her mind in the near future?*"

The lawyer bowed his head.

"That is so. I fancied that Miss Arundell had had some violent altercation with her family. I thought it probable that when she cooled down she would repent of her rash decision."

"In which case she would have done—what?"

"She would have given me instructions to prepare a new will."

"She might have taken the simpler course of merely destroying the will lately made, in which case the older will would have been good?"

"That is a somewhat debatable point. All earlier wills, you understand, had been definitely revoked by the testator."

"But Miss Arundell would not have had the legal knowledge to appreciate that point. She may have thought that by destroying the later will, the earlier one would stand."

"It is quite possible."

"Actually, if she died intestate, her money would pass to her family?"

"Yes. One half to Mrs. Tanios, one half divisible between Charles and Theresa Arundell. But the fact remains, however, that she did *not* change her mind! She died with her decision unchanged."

"But that," said Poirot, "is where I come in."

The lawyer looked at him inquiringly.

Poirot leaned forward.

"Supposing," he said, "that Miss Arundell, on her

deathbed, *wished to destroy that will.* Supposing that she believed that she *had* destroyed it—but that, in reality, she only destroyed the *first* will.”

Mr. Purvis shook his head.

“No, *both* wills were intact.”

“Then supposing she destroyed a *dummy* will—*under the impression that she was destroying the genuine document.* She was very ill, remember; it would be easy to deceive her.”

“You would have to bring evidence to that effect,” said the lawyer sharply.

“Oh, undoubtedly—undoubtedly....”

“Is there—may I ask—is there any reason to believe something of the kind happened?”

Poirot drew back a little.

“I should not like to commit myself at this stage—”

“Naturally, naturally,” said Mr. Purvis, agreeing with a phrase that was familiar to him.

“But I may say, strictly in confidence, that there are some curious features about this business!”

“Really? You don’t say so?”

Mr. Purvis rubbed his hands together with a kind of pleasurable anticipation.

“What I wanted from you and what I have got,” continued Poirot, “is your opinion that Miss Arundell would, sooner or later, have changed her mind and relented towards her family.”

“That is only my personal opinion, of course,” the lawyer pointed out.

“My dear sir, I quite understand. You do not, I believe, act for Miss Lawson?”

“I advised Miss Lawson to consult an independent solicitor,” said Mr. Purvis.

His tone was wooden.

Poirot shook hands with him, thanking him for his kindness and the information he had given us.

Second Visit to Littlegreen House

On our way from Harchester to Market Basing, a matter of some ten miles, we discussed the situation.

"Have you any grounds at all, Poirot, for that suggestion you threw out?"

"You mean that Miss Arundell may have believed that that particular will was destroyed? No, *mon ami*—frankly, no. But it was incumbent upon me—you must perceive that—to make *some* sort of suggestion! Mr. Purvis is a shrewd man. Unless I threw out some hint of the kind I did, he would ask himself what I could be doing in this affair."

"Do you know what you remind me of, Poirot?"

"No, *mon ami*."

"Of a juggler juggling with a lot of different-coloured balls! They are all in the air at once."

"The different-coloured balls are the different lies I tell—eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"And some day, you think, there will come the grand crash?"

"You can't keep it up for ever," I pointed out.

"That is true. There will come the grand moment when I catch the balls one by one, make my bow, and walk off the stage."

"To the sound of thunderous applause from the audience."

Poirot looked at me rather suspiciously.

"That well may be, yes."

"We didn't learn very much from Mr. Purvis," I remarked, edging away from the danger-point.

"No, except that it confirmed our general ideas."

"And it confirmed Miss Lawson's statement that she knew nothing about the will until after the old lady's death."

"Me, I do not see that it confirmed anything of the sort."

"Purvis advised Miss Arundell not to tell her, and Miss Arundell replied that she had no intention of doing so."

"Yes, that is all very nice and clear. But there are keyholes, my friend, and keys that unlock locked drawers."

"Do you really think that Miss Lawson would eavesdrop and poke and pry around?" I asked, rather shocked. Poirot smiled.

"Miss Lawson—she is not an old school tie, *mon cher*. We know that she overheard *one* conversation which she was not supposed to have heard—I refer to the one in which Charles and his aunt discussed the question of bumping off miserly relatives."

I admitted the truth of that.

"So you see, Hastings, she may easily have overheard some of the conversation between Mr. Purvis and Miss Arundell. He has a good, resonant voice.

"As for poking and prying," went on Poirot, "more people do it than you would suppose. Timid and easily frightened people such as Miss Lawson often acquire a number of mildly dishonourable habits which are a great solace and recreation to them."

"Really, Poirot!" I protested.

He nodded his head a good many times.

"But yes, it is so, it is so."

We arrived at The George and took a couple of rooms. Then we strolled off in the direction of Littlegreen House.

When we rang the bell, Bob immediately answered the challenge. Dashing across the hall, barking furiously, he flung himself against the front door.

"I'll have your liver and your lights!" he snarled. "I'll tear you limb from limb! I'll teach you to try and get into *this* house! Just wait until I get my teeth into you."

A soothing murmur added itself to the clamour.

"Now then, boy. Now then, there's a good doggie. Come in here."

Bob, dragged by the collar, was immured in the morning-room much against his will.

"Always spoiling a fellow's sport," he grumbled. "First chance I've had of giving any one a really good fright for ever so long. Just aching to get my teeth into a trouser leg. You be careful of yourself without me to protect you."

The door of the morning-room was shut on him, and Ellen drew back bolts and bars and opened the front door.

"Oh, it's you, sir," she exclaimed.

She drew the door right back. A look of highly pleasurable excitement spread over her face.

"Come in, sir, if you please, sir."

We entered the hall. From beneath the door on the left, loud snuffling sounds proceeded, interspersed with growls. Bob was endeavouring to "place" us correctly.

"You can let him out," I suggested.

"I will, sir. He's quite all right, really, but he makes such a noise and rushes at people so it frightens them. He's a splendid watchdog though."

She opened the morning-room door, and Bob shot through like a suddenly projected cannon-ball.

"Who is it? Where are they? Oh, there you are. Dear me, don't I seem to remember—" Sniff—sniff—sniff—prolonged snort. "Of course! We *have* met!"

"Hullo, old man," I said. "How goes it?"

Bob wagged his tail perfunctorily.

"Nicely, thank you. Let me just see—" He resumed his researches. "Been talking to a spaniel lately, I smell. Foolish dogs, I think. What's this? A cat? That is interesting. Wish we had her there. We'd have a rare sport. H'm—not a bad bull-terrier."

Having correctly diagnosed a visit I had lately paid to some doggy friends, he transferred his attentions to Poirot, inhaled a noseful of benzine and walked away reproachfully.

"Bob," I called.

He threw me a look over his shoulder.

"It's all right. I know what I'm doing. I'll be back in a jiffy."

"The house is all shut up. I hope you'll excuse—" Ellen hurried into the morning-room and began to unfasten the shutters.

"Excellent, this is excellent," said Poirot, following her in and sitting down. As I was about to join him, Bob reappeared from some mysterious region, ball in mouth. He dashed up the stairs and sprawled himself on the top step, his ball between his paws. His tail wagged slowly.

"Come on," he said. "Come on. Let's have a game."

My interest in detection momentarily eclipsed, we played for some minutes, then with a feeling of guilt I hurried into the morning-room.

Poirot and Ellen seemed to be well away on the subject of illness and medicines.

"Some little white pills, sir, that's all she used to take. Two or three after every meal. That was Dr. Grainger's orders. Oh, yes, she was very good about it. Tiny little things they were. And then there was some stuff Miss Lawson swore by. Capsules, they were, Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules. You can see advertisements of them on all the hoardings."

"She took those too?"

"Yes. Miss Lawson got her them to begin with, and she thought they did her good."

"Did Dr. Grainger know?"

"Oh, sir, he didn't mind. 'You take 'em if you think they do you good,' he'd say to her. And she said, 'Well, you may laugh, but they *do* do me good. A lot better than any of *your* physic.' And Dr. Grainger, he laughed, and said faith was worth all the drugs ever invented."

"She didn't take anything else?"

"No. Miss Bella's husband, the foreign doctor, he went out and got her a bottle of something, but although she thanked him very politely she poured it away and that I know for a fact! And I think she was right. You don't know where you are with these foreign things."

"Mrs. Tanios saw her pouring it away, didn't she?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid she was rather poor about the poor lady. I'm sorry, too, for no doubt it was ~~that~~ meant on the doctor's part."

"No doubt. No doubt. I suppose ~~my mother~~ that were left in the house were ~~there~~ ~~any~~ when Miss Arundell died?"

Ellen looked a little surprised at the question.

"Oh, yes, sir. The nurse threw away some and Miss Lawson got rid of all the old lot in the ~~bedroom~~ ~~in~~ the bathroom."

"Is that where the—er—Dr. Longbottom's Little Capsules were kept?"

"No, they were kept in the ~~common-sense~~ ~~in~~ the dining-room so as to be handy for taking ~~the~~ ~~one~~ as directed."

"What nurse attended Miss Arundell? Can you give me her name and address?"

Ellen could supply that at once and did.

Poirot continued to ask questions about Miss Arundell's last illness.

Ellen gave details with relish, describing the sickness, the pain, the onset of jaundice, and the final delirium. I don't know whether Poirot got any satisfaction out of the catalogue. He listened patiently enough and occasionally interpolated some pertinent little question, usually about Miss Lawson and the amount of time she spent in the sick-room. He was also exceedingly interested in the diet administered to the ill woman, comparing it with that administered to some dead relative (non-existent) of his own.

Seeing that they were enjoying themselves so much, I stole out in the hall again. Bob had gone to sleep on the landing, his ball lying under his chin.

I whistled to him and he sprang up, alert at once. This time, however, doubtless out of offended dignity, he made a protracted business of dispatching the ball down to me, several times catching it back at the last minute.

"Disappointed, aren't you? Well, perhaps I will let you have it this time."

When I next went back to the morning-room, Poirot

was talking about Dr. Tanios's surprise visit on the Sunday before the old lady's death.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Charles and Miss Theresa were out for a walk. Dr. Tanios wasn't expected, I know. The mistress was lying down and she was very surprised when I told her who it was. 'Dr. Tanios?' she said. 'Is Mrs. Tanios with him?' I told her no, the gentleman had come alone. So she said to tell him she'd be down in a minute."

"Did he stay long?"

"Not above an hour, sir. He didn't look too pleased when he went away."

"Have you any idea of the—er—purpose of his visit?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure, sir."

"You did not happen to hear anything?"

Ellen's face flushed suddenly.

"No, I did *not*, sir! I've never been one to listen at doors, no matter what *some* people will do—and people who ought to know better!"

"Oh, but you misunderstand me." Poirot was eager, apologetic. "It just occurred to me that perhaps you might have brought in tea while the gentleman was there and if so, you could hardly have helped hearing what he and your mistress were talking about."

Ellen was mollified.

"I'm sorry, sir, I misunderstood you. No, Dr. Tanios didn't stay for tea."

Poirot looked up at her and twinkled a little.

"And if I want to know what he came down for—well, it is possible that Miss Lawson might be in a position to know? Is that it?"

"Well, if she doesn't know, sir, nobody does," said Ellen with a sniff.

"Let me see." Poirot frowned as though trying to remember. "Miss Lawson's bedroom—was it next to Miss Arundell's?"

"No, sir. Miss Lawson's room is right at the top of the staircase. I can show you, sir."

Poirot accepted the offer. As he went up the stairs he kept close to the wall side, and just as he reached the

top uttered an exclamation and stooped to his trouser-leg.

"Ah—I have just caught a thread—ah, yes, there is a nail here in the skirting-board."

"Yes, there is, sir. I think it must have worked loose or something. I've caught my dress on it once or twice."

"Has it been like that long?"

"Well, some time, I'm afraid, sir. I noticed it first when the mistress was laid up—after her accident, that was, sir—I tried to pull it out but I couldn't."

"It has had a thread round it some time, I think."

"That's right, sir, there was a little loop of thread, I remember. I can't think what for, I'm sure."

But there was no suspicion in Ellen's voice. To her it was just one of the things that occur in houses and which one does not bother to explain!

Poirot had stepped into the room at the top of the stairs. It was of moderate size. There were two windows directly facing us. There was a dressing-table across one corner and between the windows was a wardrobe with a long mirror. The bed was to the right behind the door facing the windows. On the left-hand wall of the room was a big mahogany chest of drawers and a marble-topped washstand.

Poirot looked round the room thoughtfully and then came out again on the landing. He went along the passage, passing two other bedrooms, and then came to the large bed-chamber which had belonged to Emily Arundell.

"The nurse had the little room next door," Ellen explained.

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

As we descended the stairs, he asked if he might walk round the garden.

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly. It looks lovely just now."

"The gardener is still employed?"

"Angus? Oh, yes, Angus is still here. Miss Lawson wants everything kept nice because she thinks it will sell better that way."

"I think she is wise. To let a place run to seed is not the good policy."

The garden was very peaceful and beautiful. The wide borders were full of lupins and delphiniums and great scarlet poppies. The peonies were in bud. Wandering along, we came presently to a potting-shed where a big, rugged old man was busy. He saluted us respectfully and Poirot engaged him in conversation.

A mention that we had seen Mr. Charles that day thawed the old man and he became quite garrulous.

"Always a one, he was! I've known him come out here with half a gooseberry pie and the cook hunting high and low for it! And he'd go back with such an innocent face that durned if they wouldn't say it must have been the cat, though I've never known a cat eat a gooseberry pie! Oh, he's a one, Mr. Charles is!"

"He was down here in April, wasn't he?"

"Yes, down here two week-ends. Just before the missus died, it was."

"Did you see much of him?"

"A good bit, I did. There wasn't much for a young gentleman to do down here, and that's a fact. Used to stroll up to The George and have one. And then he'd potter round here, asking me questions about one thing and another."

"About flowers?"

"Yes—flowers—and weeds too." The old man chuckled.

"Weeds?"

Poirot's voice held a sudden, tentative note. He turned his head and looked searchingly along the shelves. His eye stopped at a tin.

"Perhaps he wanted to know how you got rid of them?"

"He did that!"

"I suppose this is the stuff you use."

Poirot turned the tin gently round and read the label.

"That's it," said Angus. "Very handy stuff it is."

"Dangerous stuff?"

"Not if you use it right. It's arsenic, of course. Had a bit of a joke about that, Mr. Charles and I did. Said as how when he had a wife and didn't like her, he'd come to me and get a little of that stuff to put her away with! Maybe, I sez, *she'll* be the one that wants to do away

with you! Ah, that made him laugh proper, that did! It was a good one, that!"

We laughed as in duty bound. Poirot prised up the lid of the tin.

"Nearly empty," he murmured.

The old man had a look.

"Ay, there's more gone than I thought. No idea I'd used that much. I'll be having to order some more."

"Yes," said Poirot, smiling. "I'm afraid there's hardly enough for you to spare me some for *my* wife!"

We all had another good laugh over this witticism.

"You're not married, I take it, mister?"

"No."

"Ah! It's always them as isn't that can afford to joke about it. Those that isn't married don't know what trouble is!"

"I gather that your wife—?" Poirot paused delicately.

"She's alive all right—very much so."

Angus seemed a little depressed about it.

Complimenting him on his garden, we bade him farewell.

CHAPTER XXI

The Chemist. The Nurse. The Doctor

The tin of weed-killer had started a new train of thought in my mind. It was the first definite suspicious circumstance that I had encountered. Charles's interest in it, the old gardener's obvious surprise at finding the tin almost empty—it all seemed to point in the right direction.

Poirot was, as usual when I am excited, very non-committal.

"Even if some of the weed-killer *has* been taken, there is as yet no evidence that Charles was the person to take it, Hastings."

"But he talked so much to the gardener about it!"

"Not a very wise procedure if he was going to help himself to some."

Then he went on :

"What is the first and simplest poison to come into your mind if you were asked to name one quickly?"

"Arsenic, I suppose."

"Yes. You understand, then, that very marked pause before the word 'strychnine' when Charles was talking to us to-day."

"You mean—?"

"That he was about to say 'arsenic in the soup,' and stopped himself."

"Ah!" I said, "and why did he stop himself?"

"Exactly. *Why?* I may say, Hastings, that it was to find the answer to that particular 'why?' which made me go out into the garden in search of any likely source of weed-killer."

"And you found it!"

"And I found it."

I shook my head.

"It begins to look rather bad for young Charles. You had a good talk with Ellen over the old lady's illness. Did her symptoms resemble those of arsenic poisoning?"

Poirot rubbed his nose.

"It is difficult to say. There was abdominal pain—sickness."

"Of course—that's it!"

"H'm, I am not so sure."

"What poison did it resemble?"

"*Eh bien*, my friend, it resembled not so much poison as disease of the liver and death from that cause!"

"Oh, Poirot," I cried. "It *can't* be natural death! It's *got* to be murder!"

"Oh, *là là*, we seem to have changed places, you and I."

He turned abruptly into a chemist's shop. After a long discussion of Poirot's particular internal troubles, he purchased a small box of indigestion lozenges. Then, when his purchase was wrapped up and he was about to leave the shop, his attention was taken by an attract-

ively wrapped package of Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules.

"Yes, sir, a very good preparation." The chemist was a middle-aged man of a chatty disposition. "You'll find them very efficacious."

"Miss Arundell used to take them, I remember. Miss Emily Arundell."

"Indeed she did, sir. Miss Arundell of Littlegreen House. A fine old lady, one of the old school. I used to serve her."

"Did she take many patent medicines?"

"Not really, sir. Not so many as some elderly ladies I could name. Miss Lawson, now, her companion, the one that's come into all the money—"

Poirot nodded.

"She was a one for this, that, and the other. Pills, lozenges, dyspepsia tablets, digestive mixtures, blood mixtures. Really enjoyed herself among the bottles." He smiled ruefully. "I wish there were more like her. People nowadays don't take to medicines as they used to. Still, we sell a lot of toilet preparations to make up for it."

"Did Miss Arundell take these Liver Capsules regularly?"

"Yes, she'd been taking them for three months, I think, before she died."

"A relative of hers, a Dr. Tanios, came in to have a mixture made up one day, didn't he?"

"Yes, of course, the Greek gentleman that married Miss Arundell's niece. Yes, a very interesting mixture it was. One I've not previously become acquainted with."

The man spoke as of a rare botanical trophy.

"It makes a change, sir, when you get something new. Very interesting combination of drugs, I remember. Of course, the gentleman is a doctor. Very nice he was—a pleasant way with him."

"Did his wife do any shopping here?"

"Did she now? I don't recall. Oh, yes, came in for a sleeping-draught—chloral it was, I remember. A double quantity the prescription was for. It's always

a little difficult for us with hypnotic drugs. You see, most doctors don't prescribe much at a time."

"Whose prescription was it?"

"Her husband's, I think. Oh, of course, it was quite all *right*—but, you know, we have to be careful nowadays. Perhaps you don't know the fact, but if a doctor makes a mistake in a prescription and we make it up in all good faith and anything goes wrong it's we who have to take the blame—not the doctor."

"That seems very unfair!"

"It's worrying, I'll admit. Ah, well, I can't complain. No trouble has come *my* way—touching wood."

He rapped the counter sharply with his knuckles.

Poirot decided to buy a package of Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules.

"Thank you, sir. Which size—25, 50, 100?"

"I suppose the larger ones are better value—but still—"

"Have the 50, sir. That's the size Miss Arundell had. Eight and six."

Poirot agreed, paid over eight and six and received the parcel.

Then we left the shop.

"So Mrs. Tanios bought a sleeping-draught," I exclaimed as we got out into the street. "An overdose of that would kill any one, wouldn't it?"

"With the greatest of ease."

"Do you think old Miss Arundell—"

I was remembering Miss Lawson's words, "*I dare say she'd murder some one if he told her to!*"

Poirot shook his head.

"Chloral is a narcotic and a hypnotic. Used to alleviate pain and as a sleeping-draught. It can also become a habit."

"Do you think Mrs. Tanios had acquired the habit?"

Poirot shook his head perplexedly.

"No, I hardly think so. But it is curious. I can think of one explanation. But that would mean—"

He broke off and looked at his watch.

"Come, let us see if we can find this Nurse Carruthers who was with Miss Arundell in her last illness."

Nurse Carruthers proved to be a sensible-looking, middle-aged woman.

Poirot now appeared in yet another rôle and with one more fictitious relative. This time he had an aged mother for whom he was anxious to find a sympathetic hospital nurse.

"You comprehend—I am going to speak to you quite frankly. My mother, she is difficult. We have had some excellent nurses, young women, fully competent, but the very fact that they are young has been against them. My mother dislikes young women, she insists on them. She is rude and fractious, she fights against open windows and modern hygiene. It is very difficult." He sighed mournfully.

"I know," said Nurse Carruthers sympathetically. "It's very trying sometimes. One has to use a lot of tact. It's no use upsetting a patient. Better to give in to them as far as you can. And once they feel you're not trying to force things on them, they very often relax and give in like lambs."

Nurse Carruthers, conscious of her own comfortable plumpness, preened herself slightly.

"Of course," she said, "one shouldn't be *too* thin."

"Poor girl," continued Poirot. "I am sorry for her. *Entre nous*," he leaned forward confidentially, "her aunt's will was a great blow."

"I suppose it must have been," said Nurse Carruthers. "I know it caused a good deal of *talk*."

"I cannot imagine what induced Miss Arundell to disinherit all her family. It seems an extraordinary procedure."

"Most extraordinary. I agree with you. And, of course, people say there must have been something behind it all."

"Did you ever get any idea of the *reason*? Did old Miss Arundell say anything?"

"No. Not to me—that is."

"But to somebody else?"

"Well, I rather fancy she mentioned *something* to Miss Lawson because I heard Miss Lawson say, 'Yes, dear, but you see it's at the lawyer's.' And Miss Arundell said, 'I'm sure it's in the drawer downstairs.' And Miss Lawson said, 'No, you sent it to Mr. Purvis. Don't you remember?' And then my patient had an attack of nausea again and Miss Lawson went away while I saw to her, but I've often wondered if it was the will they were talking about."

"It certainly seems probable."

Nurse Carruthers went on :

"If so, I expect Miss Arundell was worried and perhaps wanted to alter it—but there, she was so ill, poor dear, after that—that she was past thinking of anything."

"Did Miss Lawson take part in the nursing at all?" asked Poirot.

"Oh, dear no, she was no manner of good! Too fussy, you know. She only irritated my patient."

"Did you, then, do all the nursing yourself? *C'est formidable ça*."

"The maid—what was her name—Ellen, helped me. Ellen was very good. She was used to illness and used

to looking after the old lady. We managed pretty well between us. As a matter of fact, Dr. Grainger was sending in a night nurse on the Friday, but Miss Arundell died before the night nurse arrived."

"Perhaps Miss Lawson helped to prepare some of the invalid's food?"

"No, she didn't do anything at all. There wasn't really anything to prepare. I had the Valentine and the brandy—and the Brand's and glucose and all that. All Miss Lawson did was to go about the house crying and getting in every one's way."

The nurse's tone held distinct acrimony.

"I can see," said Poirot, smiling, "that you have not a very high opinion of Miss Lawson's usefulness."

"Companions are usually a poor lot, in my opinion. They're not *trained*, you see, in any way. Just *amateurs*. And usually they're women who wouldn't be any good at anything else."

"Do you think Miss Lawson was very attached to Miss Arundell?"

"She seemed to be. Very upset and took on terribly when the old lady died. More than the relatives did, in *my* opinion," Nurse Carruthers finished with a sniff.

"Perhaps, then," said Poirot, nodding his head sagely, "Miss Arundell knew what she was doing when she left her money as she did."

"She was a very shrewd old lady," said the nurse. "There wasn't much *she* didn't take in and know about, I must say!"

"Did she mention the dog, Bob, at all?"

"It's funny you should say that! She talked about him a lot—when she was delirious. Something about his ball and a fall she'd had. A nice dog, Bob was—I'm very fond of dogs. Poor fellow, he was very miserable when she died. Wonderful, aren't they? Quite human."

And on the note of the humanity of dogs, we parted.

"There is one who has clearly no suspicions," remarked Poirot after we had left.

He sounded slightly discouraged.

We had a bad dinner at The George—Poirot groaning a good deal, especially over the soup.

"And it is so easy, Hastings, to make good soup. *Le pot au feu*—"

I avoided a disquisition on cookery with some difficulty.

After dinner we had a surprise.

We were sitting in the "lounge" which we had to ourselves. There had been one other man at dinner—a commercial traveller by his appearance—but he had gone out. I was just idly turning over the pages of an antiquated *Stock-Breeder's Gazette* or some such periodical when I suddenly heard Poirot's name being mentioned.

The voice in question was somewhere outside.

"Where is he? In here? Right—I can find him."

The door was flung violently open, and Dr. Grainger, his face rather red, his eyebrows working irritably, strode into the room. He paused to close the door and then advanced upon us in no uncertain fashion.

"Oh, here you are! Now then, M. Hercule Poirot, what the devil do you mean by coming round to see me and telling me a pack of lies?"

"One of the juggler's balls?" I murmured maliciously.

Poirot said in his oiliest voice :

"My dear doctor, you must allow me to explain—"

"Allow you? Allow you? Damn it, I'll force you to explain! You're a detective, that's what you are! A nosing, prying detective! Coming round to me and feeding me up with a pack of lies about writing old General Arundell's biography! More fool me to be taken in by such a damn fool story."

"Who told you of my identity?" asked Poirot.

"Who told me? Miss Peabody told me. *She* saw through you all right!"

"Miss Peabody—yes." Poirot sounded reflective. "I rather thought—"

Dr. Grainger cut in angrily.

"Now then, sir, I'm waiting for your explanation!"

"Certainly. My explanation is very simple. *Attempted murder.*"

"What? What's that?"

Poirot said quietly :

"Miss Arundell had a fall, did she not? A fall down the stairs shortly before her death?"

"Yes, what of it? She slipped on that damned dog's ball."

Poirot shook his head.

"No, Doctor, *she did not*. A *thread* was fastened across the top of the stairs so as to trip her up."

Dr. Grainger stared.

"Then why didn't she tell me so?" he demanded.

"Never said a word to me about it."

"That is perhaps understandable—if it were *a member of her own family* who placed that thread there!"

"H'm—I see." Grainger cast a sharp glance at Poirot, then threw himself into a chair. "Well?" he said. "How did you come to be mixed up in this affair?"

"Miss Arundell wrote to me, stressing the utmost secrecy. Unfortunately the letter was delayed."

Poirot proceeded to give certain carefully edited details and explained the finding of the nail driven into the skirting-board.

The doctor listened with a grave face. His anger had abated.

"You can comprehend my position was a difficult one," Poirot finished. "I was employed, you see, by a dead woman. But I counted the obligation none the less strong for that."

Dr. Grainger's brows were drawn together in thought.

"And you've no idea who it was stretched that thread across the head of the stairs?" he asked.

"I have no *evidence* as to who it was. I will not say I have no *idea*."

"It's a nasty story," said Grainger, his face grim.

"Yes. You can understand, can you not, that to begin with I was uncertain whether there had or had not been a sequel?"

"Eh? What's that?"

"To all intents and purposes Miss Arundell died a natural death, but could one be sure of that? There had

been *one* attempt on her life. How could I be sure that there had not been a second? And this a successful one!"

Grainger nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose you are *sure*, Dr. Grainger—please do not get angry—that Miss Arundell's death *was* a natural one? I have come across certain evidence to-day—"

He detailed the conversation he had had with old Angus, Charles Arundell's interest in the weed-killer, and finally the old man's surprise at the emptiness of the tin.

Grainger listened with keen attention. When Poirot had finished he said quietly :

"I see your point. Many a case of arsenical poisoning has been diagnosed as acute gastric enteritis and a certificate given—especially when there are no suspicious contributing circumstances. In any case, arsenical poisoning presents certain difficulties—it has so many different forms. It may be acute, subacute, nervous or chronic. There may be vomiting and abdominal pain—these symptoms may be entirely absent—the person may fall suddenly to the ground and expire shortly afterwards—there may be narcotism and paralysis. The symptoms vary widely."

Poirot said :

:"*Eh bien*, taking the facts into account, what is your opinion?"

Dr. Grainger was silent for a minute or two. Then he said slowly :

"Taking everything into account, and without any bias whatever, I am of the opinion that no form of arsenical poisoning could account for the symptoms in Miss Arundell's case. She died, I am quite convinced, of yellow atrophy of the liver. I have, as you know, attended her for many years, and she has suffered previously from attacks similar to that which caused her death. That is my considered opinion, M. Poirot."

And there, perforce, the matter had to rest.

It seemed rather an anticlimax when, somewhat apologetically, Poirot produced the package of Liver Capsules he had bought at the chemist's.

"Miss Arundell took these, I believe?" he said. "I suppose they could not be injurious in any way?"

"That stuff? No harm in it. *Aloes—podophyllin*—all quite mild and harmless," said Grainger. "She liked trying the stuff. I didn't mind."

He got up.

"You dispensed certain medicines for her yourself?" asked Poirot.

"Yes—a mild liver pill to be taken after food." His eyes twinkled. "She could have taken a boxful without hurting herself. I'm not given to poisoning my patients, M. Poirot."

Then, with a smile, he shook hands with us both and departed.

Poirot undid the package he had purchased at the chemist's. The medicament consisted of transparent capsules, three-quarters full of a dark brown powder.

"They look like a seasick remedy I once took," I remarked.

Poirot opened a capsule, examined its contents and tasted it gingerly with his tongue. He made a grimace.

"Well," I said, throwing myself back in my chair and yawning. "Everything seems harmless enough. Dr. Loughbarrow's specialties, and Dr. Grainger's pills! And Dr. Grainger seems definitely to negative the arsenic theory. Are you convinced at last, my stubborn Poirot?"

"It is true that I am pig-headed—that is your expression, I think? Yes, definitely I have the head of the pig," said my friend meditatively.

"Then, in spite of having the chemist, the nurse and the doctor against you, you still think that Miss Arundell was murdered?"

Poirot said quietly: "That is what I believe. No—more than believe. I am *sure* of it, Hastings."

"There's one way of proving it, I suppose," I said slowly. "Exhumation."

Poirot nodded.

"Is that the next step?"

"My friend, I have to go carefully."

"Why?"

"Because," his voice dropped, "I am afraid of a second tragedy."

"You mean—?"

"I am afraid, Hastings, I am afraid. Let us leave it at that."

CHAPTER XXII

The Woman on the Stairs

On the following morning a note arrived by hand. It was in a rather weak, uncertain handwriting slanting very much uphill.

Dear M. Poirot,

I hear from Ellen that you were at Littlegreen House yesterday. I shall be much obliged if you could call and see me sometime to-day.

Yourstruly,

WILHELMINA LAWSON.

"So *she's* down here," I remarked.

"Yes."

"Why has she come, I wonder?"

Poirot smiled. "I do not suppose there is any sinister reason. After all, the house belongs to her."

"Yes, that's true, of course. You know, Poirot, that's the worst of this game of ours. Every single little thing that any one does is open to the most sinister constructions."

"It is true that I myself have enjoined upon you the motto, 'suspect every one.'"

"Are you still in that state yourself?"

"No—for me it has boiled down to this. I suspect one particular person."

"Which one?"

"Since, at the moment, it is only suspicion and there is no definite proof, I think I must leave you to draw your

own deductions, Hastings. And do not neglect the psychology—that is important. The character of the murderer—implying as it does a certain temperament in the murderer—that is an essential clue to the crime.”

“I can’t consider the character of the murderer if I don’t know who the murderer is!”

“No, no, you have not paid attention to what I have just said. If you reflect sufficiently on the character—the necessary character of the *murder*—then you will realize *who* the murderer is!”

“Do you really know, Poirot?” I asked curiously.

“I cannot say I *know* because I have no proofs. That is why I cannot say more at the present. But I am quite sure—yes, my friend, in my own mind I am very sure.”

“Well,” I said, laughing, “mind he doesn’t get you! That *would* be a tragedy!”

Poirot started a little. He did not take the matter as a joke. Instead he murmured: “You are right. I must be careful—extremely careful.”

“You ought to wear a coat of chain mail,” I said chaffingly. “And employ a taster in case of poison! In fact, you ought to have a regular band of gunmen to protect you!”

“*Merci*, Hastings, I shall rely on my wits.”

He then wrote a note to Miss Lawson saying that he would call at Littlegreen House at eleven o’clock.

After that we breakfasted and then strolled out into the Square. It was about a quarter past ten and a hot sleepy morning.

I was looking into the window of the antique shop at a very nice set of Hepplewhite chairs when I received a highly painful lunge in the ribs, and a sharp, penetrating voice said: “Hi!”

I spun round indignantly to find myself face to face with Miss Peabody. In her hand (the instrument of her assault upon me) was a large and powerful umbrella with a spiked point.

Apparently completely callous to the severe pain she had inflicted, she observed in a satisfied voice:

"Ha! Thought it was you. Don't often make a mistake."

I said rather coldly :

"Er—good-morning. Can I do anything for you?"

"You can tell me how that friend of yours is getting on with his book—*Life of General Arundell*?"

"He hasn't actually started to write it yet," I said.

Miss Peabody indulged in a little silent but apparently satisfying laughter. She shook like a jelly. Recovering from that attack, she remarked :

"No, I don't suppose he will be starting to write it."

I said, smiling :

"So you saw through our little fiction?"

"What d'you take me for—a fool?" asked Miss Peabody.

"I saw soon enough what your downy friend was after! Wanted me to talk! Well, I didn't mind. I like talking. Hard to get any one to listen nowadays. Quite enjoyed myself that afternoon."

She cocked a shrewd eye at me.

"What's it all about, eh? What's it all about?"

I was hesitating what exactly to reply when Poirot joined us. He bowed with *empressement* to Miss Peabody.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle. Enchanted to encounter you."

"Good-morning," said Miss Peabody. "What are you this morning, Parotti or Poirot—eh?"

"It was very clever of you to pierce my disguise so rapidly," said Poirot, smiling.

"Wasn't much disguise to pierce! Not many like you about, are there? Don't know if that's a good thing or a bad one. Difficult to say."

"I prefer, mademoiselle, to be unique."

"You've got your wish, I should say," said Miss Peabody drily. "Now then, Mr. Poirot, I gave you all the gossip you wanted the other day. Now it's my turn to ask questions. What's it all about? Eh? What's it all about?"

"Are you not asking a question to which you already know the answer?"

"I wonder." She shot a sharp glance at him. "Something fishy about that will? Or is it something else? Going to dig Emily up? Is that it?"

Poirot did not answer.

Miss Peabody nodded her head slowly and thoughtfully as though she had received a reply.

"Often wondered," she said inconsequently, "what it would feel like.... Readin' the papers, you know—wondered if any one would ever be dug up in Market Basing. ...Didn't think it would be Emily Arundell...."

She gave him a sudden, piercing look.

"She wouldn't have liked it, you know. I suppose you've thought of that—hey?"

"Yes, I have thought of it."

"I suppose you would do—you're not a fool! Don't think you're particularly officious either."

Poirot bowed. "Thank you, mademoiselle."

"And that's more than most people would say—looking at your moustache. Why d'you have a moustache like that? D'you like it?"

I turned away convulsed with laughter.

"In England the cult of the moustache is lamentably neglected," said Poirot. His hand surreptitiously caressed the hirsute adornment.

"Oh, I see! Funny," said Miss Peabody. "Knew a woman once who had a goitre and was proud of it! Wouldn't believe that, but it's true! Well, what I say is, it's lucky when you're pleased with what the Lord has given you. It's usually the other way about."

She shook her head and sighed.

"Never thought there would be a murder in this out-of-the-world spot." Again she shot a sudden, piercing look at Poirot. "Which of 'em did it?"

"Am I to shout that to you here in the street?"

"Probably means you don't know. Or do you? Oh, well—bad blood. I'd like to know whether that Varley woman poisoned her husband or not. Makes a difference."

"You believe in heredity?"

Miss Peabody said suddenly :

"I'd rather it was Tanios. An outsider! But wishes ain't horses, worse luck. Well, I'll be getting along. I can see you're not goin' to tell me anything.... Who are you actin' for, by the way?"

Poirot said gravely :

"I am acting for the dead, mademoiselle."

I am sorry to say that Miss Peabody received this remark with a sudden shriek of laughter. Quickly subduing her mirth she said :

"Excuse me. It sounded like Isabel Tripp—that's all! What an awful woman! Julia's worse, I think. So painfully girlish. Never did like mutton dressed lamb-fashion. Well, good-bye. Seen Dr. Grainger at all?"

"Mademoiselle, I have the bone to pick with you. You betrayed my secret."

Miss Peabody indulged in her peculiar throaty chuckle.

"Men are simple! He'd swallowed that preposterous tissue of lies you told him. Wasn't he mad when I told him! Went away snorting with rage! He's looking for you."

"He found me last night."

"Oh! I wish I'd been there."

"I wish you had, mademoiselle," said Poirot gallantly.

Miss Peabody laughed and prepared to waddle away. She addressed me over her shoulder.

"Good-bye, young man. Don't you go buying those chairs. They're a fake."

She moved off, chuckling.

"That," said Poirot, "is a very clever old woman."

"Even although she did not admire your moustaches?"

"Taste is one thing," said Poirot coldly. "Brains are another."

We passed into the shop and spent a pleasant twenty minutes looking round. We emerged unscathed in pocket and proceeded in the direction of Littlegreen House.

Ellen, rather redder in the face than usual, admitted us and showed us into the drawing-room. Presently footsteps were heard descending the stairs and Miss Lawson came in. She seemed somewhat out of breath and flustered. Her hair was pinned up in a silk handkerchief.

"I hope you'll excuse my coming in like this, M. Poirot. I've been going through some locked-up cupboards—so many things—old people are inclined to hoard a little, I'm afraid—dear Miss Arundell was no exception—and one gets so much dust in one's hair—astonishing, you know, the things people collect—if you can believe me, two dozen needlebooks—actually, two dozen."

"You mean that Miss Arundell had bought two dozen needlebooks?"

"Yes, and put them away and forgot about them—and, of course, now the needles are all rusty—such a pity. She used to give them to the maids as Christmas presents."

"She was very forgetful—yes?"

"Oh, *very*. Especially in the way of putting things away. Like a dog with a bone, you know. That's what we used to call it between us. 'Now don't go and dog and bone it,' I used to say to her."

She laughed and then producing a small handkerchief from her pocket suddenly began to sniff.

"Oh, dear," she said tearfully. "It seems so dreadful of me to be laughing here."

"You have too much sensibility," said Poirot. "You feel things too much."

"That's what my mother always used to say to me, M. Poirot. 'You take things to heart too much, Mina,' she used to say. It's a great drawback, M. Poirot, to be so sensitive. Especially when one has one's living to get."

"Ah, yes, indeed, but that is all a thing of the past. You are now your own mistress. You can enjoy yourself—travel—you have absolutely no worries or anxieties."

"I suppose that's true," said Miss Lawson rather doubtfully.

"Assuredly it is true. Now talking of Miss Arundell's forgetfulness I see how it was that her letter to me never reached me for so long a time."

He explained the circumstances of the finding of the letter. A red spot showed in Miss Lawson's cheek. She said:

"Ellen should have told *me*! To send that letter off to you without a word was great impertinence! She should have consulted me first. *Great* impertinence, I call it! Not one word did I hear about the whole thing. Disgraceful!"

"Oh, my dear lady, I am sure it was done in all good faith."

"Well, I think it was very *peculiar* myself! *Very* peculiar! Servants really do the oddest things. Ellen should have remembered that I am the mistress of the house now."

She drew herself up importantly.

"Ellen was very devoted to her mistress, was she not?" said Poirot.

"Yes, I dare say, but that makes no difference. I should have been *told*!"

"The important thing is—that I received the letter," said Poirot.

"Oh, I agree that it's no good making a fuss after things have happened, but all the same I think Ellen ought to be told that she mustn't take it upon herself to do things without asking first!"

She stopped, a red spot on each cheekbone.

Poirot was silent for a minute, then he said:-

"You wanted to see me to-day? In what way can I be of service to you?"

Miss Lawson's annoyance subsided as promptly as it had arisen. She began to be flustered and incoherent again.

"Well, really—you see, I just *wondered*... Well, to tell the truth, M. Poirot, I arrived down here yesterday and, of course, Ellen told me you had been here, and I just wondered—well, as you hadn't *mentioned* to me that you were coming—Well, it seemed rather *odd*—and I couldn't see—"

"You could not see what I was doing down here?" Poirot finished for her.

"I—well—no, that's exactly it. I couldn't."

She looked at him, flushing but inquiring.

"I must make a little confession to you," said Poirot.

"I have permitted you to remain under a misapprehension, I am afraid. You assumed that the letter I received from Miss Arundell concerned itself with the question of a small sum of money abstracted by—in all possibility—Mr. Charles Arundell."

Miss Lawson nodded.

"But that, you see, was not the case.... In fact, the first I heard of the stolen money was from you.... Miss Arundell wrote to me on the subject of her accident."

"Her accident?"

"Yes, she had a fall downstairs, I understand."

"Oh, quite—quite—" Miss Lawson looked bewildered. She stared vacantly at Poirot. She went on. "But—I'm sorry—I'm sure it's very stupid of me—but why should she write to *you*? I understand—in fact, I think you said so—that you are a detective. You're not a—a doctor too? Or a faith healer, perhaps?"

"No, I am not a doctor—nor a faith healer. But, like the doctor, I concern myself sometimes with so-called accidental deaths."

"With accidental deaths?"

"With *so-called* accidental deaths, I said. It is true that Miss Arundell did not *die*—but she might have died!"

"Oh, dear me, yes, the doctor said so, but I don't understand—"

Miss Lawson sounded still bewildered.

"The cause of the accident was supposed to be the ball of the little Bob, was it not?"

"Yes, yes, that was it. It was Bob's ball."

"Oh, no, it was not Bob's ball."

"But, excuse me, Mr. Poirot, I saw it there myself—as we all ran down."

"You saw it—yes, perhaps. But *it was not the cause of the accident. The cause of the accident, Miss Lawson, was a dark-coloured thread stretched about a foot above the top of the stairs!*"

"But—but a dog couldn't—"

"Exactly," said Poirot quickly. "A dog could not do that—he is not sufficiently intelligent—or, if you like,

he is not sufficiently *evil*.... A human being put that thread in position...."

Miss Lawson's face had gone deadly white. She raised a shaking hand to her face.

"Oh, Mr. Poirot—I can't believe it—you don't mean—but that is awful—really awful. You mean it was done on *purpose*?"

"Yes, it was done on purpose."

"But that's dreadful. It's almost like—like killing a person."

"If it had succeeded it *would* have been killing a person! In other words—it would have been murder!"

Miss Lawson gave a little shrill cry.

Poirot went on in the same grave tone.

"A nail was driven into the skirting-board so that the thread could be attached. That nail was varnished so as not to show. Tell me, do you ever remember a smell of varnish that you could not account for?"

Miss Lawson gave a cry.

"Oh, how extraordinary! To think of that! Why, of course! And to think I never thought—never dreamed—but then, how could I? And yet it did seem odd to me at the time."

Poirot leant forward.

"So—you can help us, mademoiselle. Once again you can help us. *C'est épatant!*"

"To think that was it! Oh, well, it all fits in."

"Tell me, I pray of you. You smelt varnish—yes?"

"Yes. Of course, I didn't know what it was. I thought—dear me—is it paint—no, it's more like floor stain, and then, of course, I thought I must have *imagined* it."

"When was this?"

"Now let me see—when was it?"

"Was it during that Easter week-end when the house was full of guests?"

"Yes, that was the time—but I'm trying to recall just which day it was.... Now, let me see, it wasn't Sunday. No, and it wasn't on Tuesday—that was the night Dr. Donaldson came to dinner. And on the Wednesday

"The tap that aroused you would be the tap of the hammer on the nail," mused Poirot.

"Yes, I suppose it would. But oh, M. Poirot, how dreadful—how truly dreadful. I've always felt Theresa was, perhaps, a little *wild*, but to do a thing like that—

"You are sure it was Theresa?"

"Oh, dear me, yes."

"It couldn't have been Mrs. Tanios or one of the maids for instance?"

"Oh, no, it was Theresa."

Miss Lawson shook her head and murmured to herself, "Oh, dear, oh, dear," several times.

Poirot was staring at her in a way I found it hard to understand.

"Permit me," he said suddenly, "to make an experiment. Let us go upstairs and endeavour to reconstruct this little scene."

"Reconstruct? Oh, really—I don't know—I mean I don't quite see—"

"I will show you," said Poirot, cutting in upon these doubts in an authoritative manner.

Somewhat flustered, Miss Lawson led the way upstairs.

"I hope the room's tidy—so much to do—what with one thing and another—" She tailed off incoherently.

The room was indeed somewhat heavily littered with miscellaneous articles, obviously the result of Miss Lawson's turning out of cupboards. With her usual incoherence Miss Lawson managed to indicate her own position and Poirot was able to verify for himself the fact that a portion of the staircase was reflected in the wall-mirror.

"And now, mademoiselle," he suggested, "if you will be so good as to go out and reproduce the actions that you saw."

Miss Lawson, still murmuring, "Oh, dear—" bustled out to fulfil her part. Poirot acted the part of observer.

The performance concluded, he went out on the landing and asked which electric light had been left switched on.

"This one—this one along here. Just outside Miss Arundell's door."

Poirot reached up, detached the bulb and examined it.
"A forty-watt lamp, I see. Not very powerful."

"No, it was just so that the passage shouldn't be quite dark."

Poirot retraced his steps to the top of the stairs.

"You will pardon me, mademoiselle, but with the light being fairly dim and the way that shadow falls it is hardly possible that you can have seen very clearly. Can you be positive it was Miss Theresa Arundell and not just an indeterminate female figure in a dressing-gown?"

Miss Lawson was indignant.

"No, indeed, M. Poirot! I'm *perfectly* sure! I know Theresa well enough, I should hope! Oh, it was her all right. Her dark dressing-gown and that big shining brooch she wears with the initials—I saw that plainly."

"So that there is no possible doubt. You saw the initials?"

"Yes, T. A. I know the brooch. Theresa often wore it. Oh, yes, I could swear to its being Theresa—and I will swear to it if necessary!"

There was a firmness and decision in those last two sentences that was quite at variance with her usual manner.

Poirot looked at her. Again there was something in his glance. It was aloof, appraising—and had also a queer appearance of finality about it.

"You would swear to that, yes?" he said.

"If—if—it's necessary. But I suppose it—will it be necessary?"

Again Poirot turned that appraising glance upon her.

"That will depend on the result of the exhumation," he said.

"Ex-exhumation?"

Poirot put out a restraining hand. In her excitement Miss Lawson very nearly went headlong down the stairs.

"It may possibly be a question of exhumation," he said.

"Oh, but surely—how very unpleasant! But I mean, I'm sure the family would oppose the idea very strongly—very strongly indeed."

"Probably they will."

"I'm quite sure they won't hear of such a thing!"

"Ah, but if it is an order from the Home Office."

"But, M. Poirot—*why?* I mean it's not as though—not as though—"

"Not as though what?"

"Not as though there were anything—*wrong.*"

"You think not?"

"No, of course not. Why, there *couldn't* be! I mean the doctor and the nurse and everything—"

"Do not upset yourself," said Poirot calmly and soothingly.

"Oh, but I can't help it! Poor dear Miss Arundell! It's not even as though Theresa had been here in the house when she died."

"No, she left on the Monday before she was taken ill, did she not?"

"Quite early in the morning. So you see, *she* can't have had anything to do with it!"

"Let us hope not," said Poirot.

"Oh, dear." Miss Lawson clasped her hands together.

"I've never known *anything* so dreadful as all this! Really, I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels."

Poirot glanced at his watch.

"We must depart. We are returning to London. And you, mademoiselle, you are remaining down here some little time?"

"No—no.... I have really no settled plans. Actually I'm going back myself to-day.... I only came down just for a night to—to settle things a little."

"I see. Well, good-bye, mademoiselle, and forgive me if I have upset you at all."

"Oh, M. Poirot. *Upset* me? I feel quite ill! Oh, dear—oh, dear. It's such a *wicked* world! Such a dreadfully wicked world."

Poirot cut short her lamentations by taking her hand firmly in his.

"Quite so. And you are still ready to swear *that you saw Theresa Arundell kneeling on the stairs on the night of Easter Bank Holiday?*"

"Oh, yes, I can swear to that."

"And you can also swear that you saw a halo of light round Miss Arundell's head during the *séance*?"

Miss Lawson's mouth fell open.

"Oh, M. Poirot, don't—don't joke about these things."

"I am not joking. I am perfectly serious."

Miss Lawson said with dignity :

"It wasn't exactly a halo. It was more like the beginning of a manifestation. A ribbon of some luminous material. I think it was beginning to form into a face."

"Extremely interesting. *Au revoir*, mademoiselle, and please keep all this to yourself."

"Oh, of course—of course. I shouldn't dream of doing anything else...."

The last we saw of Miss Lawson was her rather sheep-like face gazing after us from the front-door step.

CHAPTER XXIII

Dr. Tanios Calls on Us

No sooner had we left the house than Poirot's manner changed. His face was grim and set.

"*Dépêchons nous*, Hastings," he said. "We must get back to London as soon as possible."

"I'm willing." I quickened my pace to suit his. I stole a look at his grave face.

"Who do you suspect, Poirot?" I asked. "I wish you'd tell me. Do you believe it was Theresa Arundell on the stairs or not?"

Poirot did not reply to my question. Instead he asked a question of his own.

"Did it strike you—reflect before you answer—did it strike you that there was something *wrong* with that statement, of Miss Lawson's?"

"How do you mean—wrong with it?"

"If I knew that I should not be asking you!"

"Yes, but wrong in what way?"

"That is just it. I cannot be precise. But as she

was talking I had, somehow, a feeling of unreality... as though there was something—some small point that was wrong—that was, yes, that was the feeling—something that was *impossible*...."

"She seemed quite positive it was Theresa!"

"Yes, yes."

"But after all, the light couldn't have been very good. I don't see how she can be quite so sure."

"No, no, Hastings, you are not helping me. It was some small point—something connected with—yes, I am sure of it—with the bedroom."

"With the bedroom?" I repeated, trying to recall the details of the room. "No," I said at last. "I can't help you."

Poirot shook his head vexedly.

"Why did you bring up that spiritualistic business again?" I asked.

"Because it is important."

"What is important? Miss Lawson's luminous 'ribbon development'?"

"You remember the Misses Tripp's description of the *séance*?"

"I know they saw a halo round the old lady's head." I laughed in spite of myself. "I shouldn't think she was a saint by all accounts! Miss Lawson seems to have been terrified by her. I felt quite sorry for the poor woman when she described how she lay awake, worried to death because she might get into trouble over ordering too small a sirloin of beef."

"Yes, it was an interesting touch that."

"What are we going to do when we get to London?" I asked as we turned into The George and Poirot asked for the bill.

"We must go and see Theresa Arundell immediately."

"And find out the truth? But won't she deny the whole thing anyway?"

"*Mon cher*, it is not a criminal offence to kneel upon a flight of stairs! She may have been picking up a pin to bring her luck—something of that sort!"

"And the smell of varnish?"

We could say no more just then, as the waiter arrived with the bill.

On the way to London we talked very little. I am not fond of talking and driving, and Poirot was so busy protecting his moustaches with his muffler from the disastrous effects of wind and dust that speech was quite beyond him.

We arrived at the flat at about twenty to two.

George, Poirot's immaculate and extremely English manservant, opened the door.

"A Dr. Tanios is waiting to see you, sir. He has been here for half an hour."

"Dr. Tanios? Where is he?"

"In the sitting-room, sir. A lady also called to see you, sir. She seemed very distressed to find you were absent from home. It was before I received your telephone message, sir, so I could not tell her when you would be returning to London."

"Describe this lady."

"She was about five-foot-seven, sir, with dark hair and light blue eyes. She was wearing a grey coat and skirt and a hat worn very much to the back of the head instead of over the right eye."

"Mrs. Tanios," I ejaculated in a low voice.

"She seemed in a condition of great nervous excitement, sir. Said it was of the utmost importance she should find you quickly."

"What time was this?"

"About half-past ten, sir."

Poirot shook his head as he passed on towards the sitting-room.

"That is the second time I have missed hearing what Mrs. Tanios has to say. What would you say, Hastings? Is there a fate in it?"

"Third time lucky," I said consolingly.

Poirot shook his head doubtfully.

"Will there be a third time? I wonder. Come, let us hear what the husband has to say."

Dr. Tanios was sitting in an armchair reading one of Poirot's books on psychology. He sprang up and greeted us.

"You must forgive this intrusion. I hope you don't mind my forcing my way in and waiting for you like this."

"*Du tout, du tout.* Pray sit down. Permit me to offer you a glass of sherry."

"Thank you. As a matter of fact, I have an excuse. M. Poirot, I am worried, terribly worried about my wife."

"About your wife? I'm very sorry. What's the matter?"

Tanios said: "You have seen her perhaps, lately?"

It seemed quite a natural question, but the quick look that accompanied it was not so natural.

Poirot replied in the most matter-of-fact manner.

"No, not since I saw her at the hotel with you yesterday."

"Ah—I thought perhaps she might have called upon you." Poirot was busy pouring out three glasses of sherry.

He said in a slightly abstracted voice:

"No. Was there any—reason for her calling on me?"

"No, no." Dr. Tanios accepted his sherry. "Thank you. Thank you very much. No, there was no exact reason, but, to be frank, I am very much concerned about my wife's state of health."

"Ah, she is not strong?"

"Her bodily health," said Tanios slowly, "is good. I wish I could say the same for her mind."

"Ah?"

"I fear, M. Poirot, that she is on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown."

"My dear Dr. Tanios, I am extremely sorry to hear this."

"This condition has been growing for some time. During the last two months her manner towards me has completely changed. She is nervous, easily startled, and she has the oddest fancies—actually they are more than fancies—they are *delusions!*"

"Really?"

"Yes. She is suffering from what is commonly known as persecution mania—a fairly well-known condition."

Poirot made a sympathetic noise with his tongue.

"You can understand my anxiety!"

"Naturally. Naturally. But what I do not quite understand is why you have come to me. How can I help you?"

Dr. Tanios seemed a little embarrassed.

"It occurred to me that my wife might have—or may yet—come to you with some extraordinary tale. She may conceivably say that she is in danger from me—something of that kind."

"But why should she come to me?"

Dr. Tanios smiled—it was a charming smile—genial yet wistful.

"You are a celebrated detective, M. Poirot. I saw—I could see at once—that my wife was very impressed at meeting you yesterday. The mere fact of meeting a detective would make a powerful impression on her in her present state. It seems to me highly probable that she might seek you out and—and—well, confide in you. That is the way these nervous affections go! There is a tendency to turn against those nearest and dearest to you."

"Very distressing."

"Yes, indeed. I am very fond of my wife." There was a rich tenderness in his voice. "I always feel it was so brave of her to marry me—a man of another race—to come out to a far country—to leave all her own friends and surroundings. For the last few days I have been really distraught.... I can see only one thing for it...."

"Yes?"

"Perfect rest and quiet—and suitable psychological treatment. There is a splendid home I know of run by a first-class man. I want to take her down there—it is in Norfolk—straight away. Perfect rest and isolation from outside influence—that is what is needed. I feel convinced that once she has been there a month or two under skilled treatment there will be a change for the better."

"I see," said Poirot.

He uttered the words in a matter-of-fact manner without any clue to the feelings that prompted him.

Tanios again shot a quick glance at him.

"That is why, if she should come to you, I should be obliged if you will let me know at once."

"But certainly. I will telephone you. You are at the Durham Hotel still?"

"Yes. I am going back there now."

"And your wife is not there?"

"She went out directly after breakfast."

"Without telling you where she was going?"

"Without saying a word. That is most unlike her."

"And the children?"

"She took them with her."

"I see."

Tanios got up.

"Thank you so much, M. Poirot. I need hardly say that if she does tell you any high-flown stories of intimidation and persecution, pay no attention to them. It is, unfortunately, a part of her malady."

"Most distressing," said Poirot with sympathy.

"It is indeed. Although one knows, medically speaking, that it is part of a recognized mental disease, yet one cannot help being hurt when a person very near and dear to you turns against you and all their affection changes to dislike."

"You have my deepest sympathy," said Poirot as he shook hands with his guest.

"By the way—" Poirot's voice recalled Tanios just as he was at the door.

"Yes?"

"Do you ever prescribe chloral for your wife?"

Tanios gave a startled movement.

"I—no—at least I may have done. But not lately. She seems to have taken an aversion to any form of sleeping-draught."

"Ah! I suppose because she does not trust you?"

"M. Poirot!"

Tanios came striding forward angrily.

"That would be part of the disease," said Poirot smoothly.

Tanios stopped.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"She is probably highly suspicious of anything you give her to eat or drink. Probably suspects you of wanting to poison her?"

"Dear me, M. Poirot, you are quite right. You know something of such cases, then?"

"One comes across them now and then in my profession, naturally. But do not let me detain you. You may find her waiting for you at the hotel."

"True. I hope I shall. I feel terribly anxious."

He hurried out of the room.

Poirot went swiftly to the telephone. He flicked over the pages of the telephone directory and asked for a number.

"'Allo—'allo—is that the Durham Hotel? Can you tell me if Mrs. Tanios is in? What? T-A-N-I-O-S. Yes, that is right. Yes? Yes? Oh, I see."

He replaced the receiver.

"Mrs. Tanios left the hotel this morning early. She returned at eleven, waited in the taxi whilst her luggage was brought down and drove away with it."

"Does Tanios know she took away her luggage?"

"I think not as yet."

"Where has she gone?"

"Impossible to tell."

"Do you think she will come back here?"

"Possibly. I cannot tell."

"Perhaps she will write."

"Perhaps."

"What can we do?"

Poirot shook his head. He looked worried and distressed.

"Nothing at the moment. A hasty lunch and then we will go and see Theresa Arundell."

"Do you believe it was her on the stairs?"

"Impossible to tell. One thing I made sure of—Miss Lawson could not have seen her face. She saw a tall figure in a dark dressing-gown, that is all."

"And the brooch?"

"My dear friend, a brooch is not a part of a dress."

anatomy! It can be detached from that person. It can be lost—or borrowed—or even stolen."

"In other words, you don't want to believe Theresa Arundell guilty?"

"I want to hear what she has to say on the matter."

"And if Mrs. Tanios comes back?"

"I will arrange for that."

George brought in an omelette.

"Listen, George," said Poirot. "If that lady comes back, you will ask her to wait. If Dr. Tanios comes while she is here, on no account let him in. If he asks if his wife is here, you will tell him she is not. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

Poirot attacked the omelette.

"This business complicates itself," he said. "We must step very carefully. If not—the murderer will strike again."

"If he did you might get him."

"Quite possibly, but I prefer the life of the innocent to the conviction of the guilty. We must go very, very carefully."

CHAPTER XXIV

Theresa's Denial

We found Theresa Arundell just preparing to go out. She was looking extraordinarily attractive. A small hat of the most outrageous fashion descended rakishly over one eye. I recognized with momentary amusement that Bella Tanios had worn a cheap imitation of such a hat yesterday and had worn it—as George had put it—on the back of the head instead of over the right eye. I remembered well how she had pushed it further and further back on her untidy hair.

Poirot said politely :

"Can I have just a minute or two, mademoiselle, or will it delay you too much?"

Theresa laughed. "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm always three-quarters of an hour late for everything. I might just as well make it an hour."

She led him into the sitting-room. To my surprise Dr. Donaldson rose from a chair by the window.

"You've met M. Poirot already, Rex, haven't you?"

"We met at Market Basing," said Donaldson stiffly.

"You were pretending to write the life of my drunken grandfather, I understand," said Theresa. "Rex, my angel, will you leave us?"

"Thank you, Theresa, but I think that from every point of view it would be advisable for me to be present at this interview."

There was a brief duel of eyes. Theresa's were commanding. Donaldson's were impervious. She showed a quick flash of anger.

"All right, stay then, damn you!"

Mr. Donaldson seemed unperturbed.

He seated himself again in the chair by the window, laying down his book on the arm of it. It was a book on the pituitary gland, I noticed.

Theresa sat down on her favourite low stool and looked impatiently at Poirot.

"Well, you've seen Purvis? What about it?"

Poirot said in a non-committal voice :

"There are—possibilities, mademoiselle."

She looked at him thoughtfully. Then she sent a very faint glance in the direction of the doctor. It was, I think, intended as a warning to Poirot.

"But it would be well, I think," went on Poirot, "for me to report later when my plans are more advanced."

A faint smile showed for a minute on Theresa's face. Poirot continued :

"I have to-day come from Market Basing and while there I have talked to Miss Lawson. Tell me, mademoiselle, did you on the night of April 13th (that was the night of the Easter Bank Holiday) kneel upon the stairs after every one had gone to bed?"

"My dear Hercule Poirot, what an extraordinary question. Why should I?"

"The question, mademoiselle, is not why you *should*, but whether you *did*."

"I'm sure I don't know. I should think it most unlikely."

"You comprehend, mademoiselle, Miss Lawson *says you did*."

Theresa shrugged her attractive shoulders.

"Does it matter?"

"It matters very much."

She stared at him in a perfectly amiable fashion. Poirot stared back.

"Loopy!" said Theresa.

"Pardon?"

"Definitely loopy!" said Theresa. "Don't you think so, Rex?"

Dr. Donaldson coughed.

"Excuse me, M. Poirot, but what is the point of the question?"

My friend spread out his hands.

"It is most simple! Some one drove in a nail in a convenient position at the head of the stairs. The nail was just touched with brown varnish to match the skirting-board."

"Is this a new kind of witchcraft?" asked Theresa.

"No, mademoiselle, it is much more homely and simple than that. On the following evening, the Tuesday, *some one* attached a string or thread from the nail to the balusters with the result that when Miss Arundell came out of her room she caught her foot in it and went head-long down the stairs."

Theresa drew in her breath sharply.

"That was Bob's ball!"

"Pardon, it was not."

There was a pause. It was broken by Donaldson, who said in his quiet, precise voice :

"Excuse me, but what evidence have you in support of this statement?"

Poirot said quietly :

"The evidence of the nail, the evidence of Miss Arundell's own written words, and finally the evidence of Miss Lawson's eyes."

Theresa found her voice.

"She says *I* did it, does she?"

Poirot did not answer except by bending his head a little.

"Well, it's a lie! I had nothing to do with it!"

"You were kneeling on the stairs for quite another reason?"

"I wasn't kneeling on the stairs at all!"

"Be careful, mademoiselle."

"I wasn't there! I never came out of my room after I went to bed on any evening I was there."

"Miss Lawson recognized you."

"It was probably Bella Tanios or one of the maids she saw."

"She says it was you."

"She's a damned liar!"

"She recognized your dressing-gown and a brooch you wear."

"A brooch—what brooch?"

"A brooch with your initials."

"Oh, I know the one! What a circumstantial liar she is!"

"You still deny that it was you she saw?"

"If it's my word against hers—"

"You are a better liar than she is—eh?"

Theresa said calmly :

"That's probably quite true. But in this case I'm speaking the truth. I wasn't preparing a booby trap or saying my prayers, or picking up gold or silver, or doing anything at all on the stairs."

"Have you this brooch that was mentioned?"

"Probably. Do you want to see it?"

"If you please, mademoiselle."

Theresa got up and left the room. There was an awkward silence. Dr. Donaldson looked at Poirot much as I imagined he might have looked at an anatomical specimen.

Theresa returned. "Here it is."

She almost flung the ornament at Poirot. It was a large, rather showy chromium or stainless steel brooch

with T. A. enclosed in a circle. I had to admit that it was large enough and showy enough to be easily seen in Miss Lawson's mirror.

"I never wear it now. I'm tired of it," said Theresa. "London's been flooded with them. Every little skivvy wears one."

"But it was expensive when you bought it?"

"Oh, yes. They were quite exclusive to begin with."

"When was that?"

"Last Christmas, I think it was. Yes, about then."

"Have you ever lent it to any one?"

"No."

"You had it with you at Littlegreen House?"

"I suppose I did. Yes, I did. I remember."

"Did you leave it about at all? Was it out of your possession while you were there?"

"No, it wasn't. I wore it on a green jumper, I remember. And I wore the same jumper every day."

"And at night?"

"It was still in the jumper."

"And the jumper?"

"Oh, hell, the jumper was sitting on a chair."

"You are sure no one removed the brooch and put it back again the next day?"

"We'll say so in court if you like—if you think that's the best lie to tell! Actually I'm *quite sure* that nothing like that happened! It's a pretty idea that somebody framed me—but I don't think it's true."

Poirot frowned. Then he got up, attached the brooch carefully to his coat lapel and approached a mirror on a table at the other end of the room. He stood in front of it and then moved slowly backward, getting an effect of distance.

Then he uttered a grunt.

"Imbecile that I am! Of course!"

He came back and handed the brooch to Theresa with a bow.

"You are quite right, mademoiselle. The brooch did *not* leave your possession! I have been regrettably dense."

"I do like modesty," said Theresa, pinning the brooch on carelessly.

She looked up at him.

"Anything more? I ought to be going."

"Nothing that cannot be discussed later."

Theresa moved towards the door. Poirot went on in a quiet voice :

"There is a question of exhumation, it is true—"

Theresa stopped dead. The brooch fell from her hand to the ground.

"What's that?"

Poirot said clearly :

"It is possible that the body of Miss Emily Arundell may be exhumed."

Theresa stood still, her hands clenched. She said in a low, angry voice :

"Is this *your* doing? It can't be done without an application from the family!"

"You are wrong, mademoiselle. It can be done on an order from the Home Office."

"My God!" said Theresa.

She turned and walked swiftly up and down.

Donaldson said quietly :

"I really don't see that there is any need to be so upset, Tessa. I dare say that to an outsider the idea is not very pleasant, but—"

She interrupted him.

"Don't be a fool, Rex!"

Poirot asked :

"The idea disturbs you, mademoiselle?"

"Of course it does! It isn't decent. Poor old Aunt Emily. Why the devil *should* she be exhumed?"

"I presume," said Donaldson, "that there is some doubt as to the cause of death?" He looked inquiringly at Poirot. He went on. "I confess that I am surprised. I think that there is no doubt that Miss Arundell died a natural death from a disease of long standing."

"You told me something about a rabbit and liver trouble once," said Theresa. "I've forgotten it now, but you infect a rabbit with blood from a person with yellow

atrophy of the liver, and then you inject that rabbit's blood into another rabbit, and then that second rabbit's blood into a person and the person gets a diseased liver. Something like that."

"That was merely an illustration of serum therapeutics," said Donaldson patiently.

"Pity there are so many rabbits in the story!" said Theresa with a reckless laugh. "None of us keep rabbits." She turned on Poirot and her voice altered.

"M. Poirot, is this *true*?" she asked.

"It is true enough, but—there are ways of avoiding such a contingency, mademoiselle."

"Then avoid it!" Her voice sank almost to a whisper. It was urgent, compelling. "Avoid it *at all costs*!"

Poirot rose to his feet.

"Those are your instructions?" His voice was formal.

"Those are my instructions."

"But, Tessa—" Donaldson interrupted.

She whirled round on her fiancé.

"Be quiet! She was *my* aunt, wasn't she? Why should *my* aunt be dug up? Don't you know there will be paragraphs in the papers and gossip and general unpleasantness?" She swung round again on Poirot.

"You must stop it! I give you *carte blanche*. Do anything you like, but *stop it*!"

Poirot bowed formally.

"I will do what I can. *Au revoir, mademoiselle, au revoir, Doctor.*"

"Oh, go away!" cried Theresa. "And take St. Leonards with you. I wish I'd never set eyes on either of you."

We left the room. Poirot did not this time deliberately place his ear to the crack, but he dallied—yes, he dallied.

And not in vain. Theresa's voice rose clear and defiant:

"Don't look at me like that, Rex."

And then suddenly, with a break in her voice: "Darling."

Dr. Donaldson's precise voice answered her.

He said very clearly :

"That man means mischief."

Poirot grinned suddenly. He drew me through the front door.

"Come, St. Leonards," he said. "*C'est drôle, ça!*"

Personally I thought the joke a particularly stupid one.

CHAPTER XXV

I Lie back and Reflect

No, I thought, as I hurried after Poirot, there was no doubt about it now. Miss Arundell had been murdered and Theresa knew it. But was she herself the criminal or was there another explanation?

She was afraid—yes. But was she afraid for herself or for some one else? Could that some one be the quiet, precise young doctor with the calm, aloof manner?

Had the old lady died of genuine disease *artificially induced*?

Up to a point it all fitted in—Donaldson's ambitions, his belief that Theresa would inherit money at her aunt's death. Even the fact that he had been at dinner there on the evening of the accident. How easy to leave a convenient window open and return in the dead of night to tie the murderous thread across the staircase. But then, what about the placing of the nail in position?

No, Theresa must have done that. Theresa, his fiancée and accomplice. With the two of them working it together, the whole thing seemed clear enough. In that case it was probably Theresa who had actually placed the thread in position. The *first* crime, the crime that failed, had been *her* work. The *second* crime, the crime that had succeeded, was Donaldson's more scientific masterpiece.

Yes—it all fitted in.

Yet even now there were loose strands. Why had Theresa blurted out those facts about inducing liver disease

in human beings? It was almost as though she did not realize the truth.... But in that case—and I felt my mind growing bewildered, and I interrupted my speculations to ask :

"Where are we going, Poirot?"

"Back to my flat. It is possible that we may find Mrs. Tanios there."

My thoughts switched off on a different track.

Mrs. Tanios! That was another mystery! If Donaldson and Theresa were guilty, where did Mrs. Tanios and her smiling husband come in? What did the woman want to tell Poirot and what was Tanios's anxiety to prevent her doing so?

"Poirot," I said humbly, "I'm getting rather muddled. They're not *all* in it, are they?"

"Murder by a syndicate? A family syndicate? No, not this time. There is the mark of one brain and one brain only in this. The psychology is very clear."

"You mean that either Theresa or Donaldson did it—but not *both* of them? Did he get her to hammer that nail in on some entirely innocent pretext, then?"

"My dear friend, from the moment I heard Miss Lawson's story I realized that there were three possibilities : (1) That Miss Lawson was telling the exact truth. (2) That Miss Lawson had invented the story for reasons of her own. (3) That Miss Lawson actually believed her own story, but that her identification rested upon the brooch—and as I have already pointed out to you—a brooch is easily detachable from its owner."

"Yes, but Theresa insists that the brooch did not leave her possession."

"And she is perfectly right. I had overlooked a small but intensely significant fact."

"Very unlike you, Poirot," I said solemnly.

"*N'est-ce pas?* But one has one's lapses."

"Age will tell!"

"Age has nothing to do with it," said Poirot coldly.

"Well, what is the significant fact?" I asked as we turned in at the entrance of the Mansions.

"I will show you."

We had just reached the flat.

George opened the door to us. In reply to Poirot's anxious question he shook his head.

"No, sir, Mrs. Tanios has not called. Neither has she telephoned."

Poirot went into the sitting-room. He paced up and down for a few moments. Then he picked up the telephone. He got first on to the Durham Hotel.

"Yes—yes, please. Ah, Dr. Tanios, this is Hercule Poirot speaking. Your wife has returned? Oh, not returned. Dear me.... Taken her luggage you say.... And the children.... You have no idea where she has gone.... Yes, quite.... Oh, perfectly.... If my professional services are of any use to you? I have a certain experience in these matters.... Such things can be done quite discreetly.... No, of course not.... Yes, of course that is true.... Certainly—certainly. I shall respect your wishes in the matter."

He hung up the receiver thoughtfully.

"He does not know where she is," he said thoughtfully. "I think that is quite genuine. The anxiety in his voice is unmistakable. He does not want to go to the police; that is understandable. Yes, I understand that. He does not want my assistance either. That is, perhaps, not quite so understandable.... He wants her found—but he does not want *me* to find her.... No, definitely he does not want me to find her... He seems confident that he can manage the matter himself. He does not think she can remain long hidden, for she has very little money with her. Also she has the children. Yes, I fancy he will be able to hunt her down rather long. But, I think, Hastings, that we shall be a little quicker than he is. It is important, I think, that we should be."

"Do you think it's true that she is ~~going to~~ be married?"
I asked.

"I think that she is in a highly ~~unstable~~ condition."

"But not to such a point ~~the~~ ~~as~~ ~~we~~ ~~would~~
mental home?"

"That, very definitely, no."

"You know, Poirot, I don't quite understand all this."

"If you will pardon my saying so, Hastings, you do not understand at all!"

"There seem so many—well—side issues."

"Naturally there are side issues. To separate the main issue from the side issues is the first task of the orderly mind."

"Tell me, Poirot, have you realized all along that there were *eight* possible suspects and not seven?"

Poirot replied drily :

"I have taken that fact into consideration from the moment that Theresa Arundell mentioned that the last time she saw Dr. Donaldson was when he dined at Little-green House on April 14th."

"I can't quite see—" I broke off.

"What is it you cannot quite see?"

"Well, if Donaldson had planned to do away with Miss Arundell by scientific means—by inoculation, that is to say—I can't see why he resorted to such a clumsy device as a string across the stairs."

"*En vérité*, Hastings, there are moments when I lose patience with you! One method is a highly scientific one needing fully specialized knowledge. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And the other is a homely simple method—the kind that mother makes—as the advertisements say. Is that not right?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Then think, Hastings—*think*. Lie back in your chair, close the eyes, employ the little grey cells."

I obeyed. That is to say, I leant back in the chair and closed my eyes and endeavoured to carry out the third part of Poirot's instructions. The result, however, did not seem to clarify matters much.

I opened my eyes to find Poirot regarding me with the kindly attention a nurse might display towards a childish charge.

"*Eh bien?*"

I made a desperate attempt to emulate Poirot's manner. "Well," I said, "it seems to me that the kind of person who laid the original booby-trap is not the kind of person to plan out a scientific murder."

"Exactly."

"And I doubt if a mind trained to scientific complexities would think of anything so childish as the accident plan—it would be altogether too haphazard."

"Very clearly reasoned."

Emboldened, I went on :

"Therefore, the only logical solution seems to be this—the two attempts were planned by two different people. We have here to deal with murder attempted by two entirely different people."

"You do not think that is too much of a coincidence?"

"You said yourself once that one coincidence is nearly always found in a murder-case."

"Yes, that is true. I have to admit it."

"Well, then."

"And who do you suggest for your villains?"

"Donaldson and Theresa Arundell. A doctor is clearly indicated for the final and successful murder. On the other hand, we know that Theresa Arundell is concerned in the first attempt. I think it's possible that they acted quite independently of each other."

"You are so fond of saying 'we know,' Hastings. I can assure you that no matter what *you* know, I do not know that Theresa was implicated."

"But Miss Lawson's story."

"Miss Lawson's story is Miss Lawson's story. Just that."

"But she says—"

"She says—she says.... Always you are so ready to take what people say for a proved and accepted fact. Now listen, *mon cher*, I told you at the time, did I not, that something struck me as wrong about Miss Lawson's story?"

"Yes, I remember your saying so. But you couldn't get hold of what it was."

"Well, I have done so now. A little moment and I

will show you what I, imbecile that I am, ought to have seen at once."

He went over to the desk and opening a drawer took out a sheet of cardboard. He cut into this with a pair of scissors, motioning to me not to overlook what he was doing.

"Patience, Hastings, in a little moment we will proceed to our experiment."

I averted my eyes obligingly.

In a minute or two Poirot uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He put away the scissors, dropped the fragments of cardboard into the waste-paper basket and came across the room to me.

"Now, do not look. Continue to avert the eyes while I pin something to the lapel of your coat."

I humoured him. Poirot completed the proceeding to his satisfaction, then, propelling me gently to my feet he drew me across the room, and into the adjoining bedroom.

"Now, Hastings, regard yourself in the glass. You are wearing, are you not, a fashionable brooch with your initials on it—only, *bien entendu*, the brooch is made not of chromium nor stainless steel, nor gold, nor platinum—but of humble cardboard!"

I looked at myself and smiled. Poirot is uncommonly neat with his fingers. I was wearing a very fair representation of Theresa Arundell's brooch—a circle cut out of cardboard and enclosing my initials—A.H.

"*Eh bien*," said Poirot. "You are satisfied? You have there, have you not, a very smart brooch with your initials?"

"A most handsome affair," I agreed.

"It is true it does not gleam and reflect the light, but all the same you are prepared to admit that that brooch could be seen plainly from some distance away?"

"I've never doubted it."

"Quite so. Doubt is not your strong point. Simple faith is more characteristic of you. And now, Hastings, be so good as to remove your coat."

Wondering a little, I did so. Poirot divested himself

of his own coat and slipped on mine, turning away a little as he did so.

"And now," said he. "Regard how the brooch—the brooch with *your* initials—becomes me?"

He whisked round. I stared at him—for the moment uncomprehendingly. Then I saw the point.

"What a blithering fool I am! Of course. It's H. A. in the brooch, not A. H. at all."

Poirot beamed on me, as he reassumed his own clothes and handed me mine.

"Exactly—and now you see what struck me as wrong with Miss Lawson's story. She stated that she had seen Theresa's initials clearly on the brooch she was wearing. But she saw Theresa in the *glass*. So, *if she saw the initials at all*, she must have seen them reversed."

"Well," I argued. "Perhaps she did, and realized that they were reversed."

"*Mon cher*, did that occur to you just now? Did you exclaim, 'Ha! Poirot, you've got it wrong—that's H. A. really—not A.H.'? No, you did not. And yet you are a good deal more intelligent, I should say, than Miss Lawson. Do not tell me that a muddle-headed woman like that woke up suddenly, and still half-asleep, realized that A. T. was really T. A. No, that is not at all consistent with the mentality of Miss Lawson."

"She was determined it should be Theresa," I said slowly.

"You are getting nearer, my friend. You remember, I hint to her that she could not really see the face of any one on the stairs, and immediately—what does she do?"

"Remembers Theresa's brooch and lugs that in—forgetting that the mere fact of having seen it in the glass gave her own story the lie."

The telephone bell rang sharply. Poirot crossed to it. He only spoke a few non-committal words.

"Yes? Yes... certainly. Yes, quite convenient. The afternoon, I think. Yes, two o'clock will do admirably."

He replaced the receiver and turned to me with a smile.

I would have advised her—but there, he isn't an Englishman... And she looks so peculiar, poor thing, so—well, so *scared*. What can he have been doing to her? I believe 'Turks are frightfully cruel sometimes.'

"Dr. Tanios is a Greek."

"Yes, of course, that's the other way about—I mean, they're usually the ones who get massacred by the Turks—or am I thinking of Armenians? But all the same, I don't like to think of it. I don't think she *ought* to go back to him, do you, M. Poirot? Anyway, I mean, she says she won't.... She doesn't even want him to know where she is."

"As bad as that?"

"Yes, you see it's the *children*. She's so afraid he could take them back to Smyrna. Poor soul, she really is in a terrible way. You see, she's got no money—no money at all. She doesn't know where to go or what to do. She wants to try and earn her living, but, really, you know, M. Poirot, that's not so easy as it sounds. I know that. It's not as though she were *trained* for anything."

"When did she leave her husband?"

"Yesterday. She spent last night in a little hotel near Paddington. She came to me because she couldn't think of any one else to go to, poor thing."

"And are you going to help her? That is very good of you."

"Well, you see, M. Poirot, I really feel it's my *duty*. But, of course, it's all very difficult. This is a very small flat and there's no room—and what with one thing and another."

"You could send her to Littlegreen House?"

"I suppose I could—but you see her husband might think of that. Just for the moment I've got her rooms at the Wellington Hotel in Queen's Road. She's staying there under the name of Mrs. Peters."

"I see," said Poirot.

He paused for a minute, then said :

"I would like to see Mrs. Tanios. You see, she called at my flat yesterday but I was out."

"Oh, did she? She didn't tell me that. I'll tell her, shall I?"

"If you would be so good."

Miss Lawson hurried out of the room. We could hear her voice.

"Bella—Bella—my dear, will you come and see M. Poirot?"

We did not hear Mrs. Tanios's reply, but a minute or two later she came into the room.

I was really shocked at her appearance. There were dark circles under her eyes and her cheeks were completely destitute of colour, but what struck me far more than this was her obvious air of terror. She started at the least provocation, and she seemed to be continually listening.

Poirot greeted her in his most soothing manner. He came forward, shook hands, arranged a chair for her and handed her a cushion. He treated the pale, frightened woman as though she had been a queen.

"And now, madame, let us have a little chat. You came to see me yesterday, I believe?"

She nodded.

"I regret very much that I was away from home."

"Yes—yes, I wish you had been there."

"You came because you wanted to tell me something?"

"Yes, I—I meant to—"

"*Eh bien*, I am here, at your service."

Mrs. Tanios did not respond. She sat quite still, twisting a ring round and round on her finger.

"Well, madame?"

Slowly, almost reluctantly, she shook her head.

"No," she said. "I daren't."

"You *daren't*, madame?"

"No. I—if he knew—he'd—oh, something would happen to me!"

"Come, come, madame—that is absurd."

"Oh, but it isn't absurd—it isn't absurd at all. You don't know him..."

"By *him*, you mean your husband, madame?"

"Yes, of course."

Poirot was silent a minute or two, then he said :

"Your husband came to see me yesterday, madame."

A quick look of alarm sprang up in her face.

"Oh, no! You didn't tell him—but of course you didn't! You couldn't. You didn't know where I was. Did he—did he say I was *mad*?"

Poirot answered cautiously.

"He said that you were—highly nervous."

But she shook her head, undeceived.

"No, he said that I was mad—or that I was going mad! He wants to shut me up so that I shan't be able to tell any one ever."

"Tell any one—what?"

But she shook her head. Twisting her fingers nervously round and round, she muttered :

"I'm afraid..."

"But, madame, once you have *told* me—you are *safe*! The secret is out! The fact will protect you automatically."

But she did not reply. She went on twisting—twisting at her ring.

"You must see that yourself," said Poirot gently.

She gave a sort of gasp.

"How am I to know?... Oh, dear, it's terrible. He's so *plausible*! And he's a doctor! People will believe him and not me. I know they will. I should myself. Nobody will believe me. How could they?"

"You will not even give me the chance?"

She shot a troubled glance at him.

"How do I know? You may be on his side."

"I am on no one's side, madame. I am—always—on the side of the truth."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Tanios hopelessly. "Oh, I don't know."

She went on, her words gathering volume, tumbling over each other.

"It's been so awful—for years now. I've seen things happening again and again. And I couldn't say anything or do anything. There have been the children. It's been like a long nightmare. And now this.... But I

won't go back to him. I won't let him have the children! I'll go somewhere where he can't find me. Minnie Lawson will help me. She's been so kind—so wonderfully kind. Nobody could have been kinder." She stopped, then shot a quick look at Poirot and asked :

"What did he say about me? Did he say I had delusions?"

"He said, madame, that you had—changed towards him."

She nodded.

"And he said I had delusions. He *did* say that, didn't he?"

"Yes, madame, to be frank, he did."

"That's it, you see. That's what it will sound like. And I've no proof—no real proof."

Poirot leaned back in his chair. When he next spoke it was with an entire change of manner.

He spoke in a matter-of-fact, business-like voice with as little emotion as if he had been discussing some dry matter of business.

"Do you suspect your husband of doing away with Miss Emily Arundell?"

Her answer came quickly—a spontaneous flash.

"I don't suspect—I know."

"Then, madame, it is your duty to speak."

"Ah, but it isn't so easy—no, it isn't so easy."

"How did he kill her?"

"I don't know exactly—but he did kill her."

"But you don't know the method he employed?"

"No—it was something he did that last Sunday."

"The Sunday he went down to see her?"

"Yes."

"But you don't know what it was?"

"No."

"Then how, forgive me, madame, can you be so sure?"

"Because he—" She stopped and said slowly, "I *am* sure!"

"*Pardon*, madame, but there is something you are keeping back. Something you have not yet told me?"

"Yes."

"Come, then."

Bella Tanios got up suddenly.

"No. No. I can't do that. The children. Their father. I can't. I simply can't...."

"But, madame—"

"I can't, I tell you."

Her voice rose almost to a scream. The door opened and Miss Lawson came in, her head cocked on one side with a sort of pleasurable excitement.

"May I come in? Have you had your little talk? Bella, my dear, don't you think you ought to have a cup of tea, or some soup, or perhaps a little brandy even?"

Mrs. Tanios shook her head.

"I'm quite all right." She gave a weak smile. "I must be getting back to the children. I have left them to unpack."

"Dear little things," said Miss Lawson. "I'm so fond of children."

Mrs. Tanios turned to her suddenly.

"I don't know what I should do without you," she said. "You—you've been wonderfully kind."

"There, there, my dear, don't cry. Everything's going to be all right. You shall come round and see my lawyer—such a nice man, so sympathetic, and he'll advise you the best way to get a divorce. Divorce is so simple nowadays, isn't it, everybody says so. Oh, dear, there's the bell. I wonder who that is."

She left the room hurriedly. There was a murmur of voices in the hall. Miss Lawson reappeared. She tiptoed in and shut the door carefully behind her. She spoke in an excited whisper, mouthing the words exaggeratedly.

"Oh, dear, Bella, it's your husband. I'm sure I don't know—"

Mrs. Tanios gave one bound towards a door at the other end of the room. Miss Lawson nodded her head violently.

"That's right, dear, go in there, and then you can slip out when I've brought him in here."

Mrs. Tanios whispered :

"Don't say I've been here. Don't say you've seen me."

"No, no, of course I won't."

Mrs. Tanios slipped through the door. Poirot and followed hastily. We found ourselves in a small dining-room.

Poirot crossed to the door into the hall, opened it a crack and listened. Then he beckoned.

"All is clear. Miss Lawson has taken him into the other room."

We crept through the hall and out by the front door. Poirot drew it to as noiselessly as possible after him.

Mrs. Tanios began to run down the steps, stumbling and clutching at the banisters. Poirot steadied her with a hand under her arm.

"*Du calme—du calme.* All is well."

We reached the entrance-hall.

"Come with me," said Mrs. Tanios piteously. She looked as though she might be going to faint.

"Certainly I will come," said Poirot reassuringly.

We crossed the road, turned a corner, and found ourselves in the Queen's Road. The Wellington was a small, inconspicuous hotel of the boarding-house variety.

When we were inside, Mrs. Tanios sank down on a plush sofa. Her hand was on her beating heart.

Poirot patted her reassuringly on the shoulder.

"It was the narrow squeak—yes. Now, madame, you are to listen to me very carefully."

"I can't tell you anything more, M. Poirot. It wouldn't be right. You—you know what I think—what I believe. You—you must be satisfied with that."

"I asked you to listen, madame. Supposing—this is a supposition only—that *I already know the facts of the case.* Supposing that what you could tell me *I have already guessed*—that would make a difference, would it not?"....

She looked at him doubtfully. Her eyes were painful in their intensity.

"Oh, believe me, madame, I am not trying to trap you into saying what you do not wish to. But it *would* make a difference—yes?"

"I—I suppose it would."

"Good. Then let me say this. I, *Hercule Poirot*, know the truth. I am not going to ask you to accept my word for it. Take this." He thrust upon her the bulky envelope I had seen him seal up that morning. "The facts are there. After you have read them, if they satisfy you, ring me up. My number is on the note-paper."

Almost reluctantly she accepted the envelope.

Poirot went on briskly :

"And now, one more point, you must leave this hotel at once."

"But why?"

"You will go to the Coniston Hotel near Euston. Tell no one where you are going."

"But surely—here—Minnie Lawson won't tell my husband where I am."

"You think not?"

"Oh, no—she's entirely on my side."

"Yes, but your husband, madame, is a very clever man. He will not find it difficult to turn a middle-aged lady inside out. It is essential—*essential*, you understand, that your husband should not know where you are."

She nodded dumbly.

Poirot held out a sheet of paper.

"Here is the address. Pack up and drive there with the children as soon as possible. You understand?"

She nodded.

"I understand."

"It is the children you must think of, madame, not yourself. You love your children."

He had touched the right note.

A little colour crept into her cheeks, her head went back. She looked, not a frightened drudge, but an arrogant, almost handsome woman.

"It is arranged, then," said Poirot.

He shook hands and he and I departed. But not far. From the shelter of a convenient café, we sipped coffee and watched the entrance of the hotel. In about five minutes we saw Dr. Tanios walking down the street.

He did not even glance up at the Wellington. He passed it, his head bowed in thought, then he turned into the Underground station.

About ten minutes later we saw Mrs. Tanios and the children get into the taxi with their luggage and drive away.

"*Bien*," said Poirot, rising with the bill in his hand. "We have done our part. Now it is on the knees of the gods."

CHAPTER XXVII

Visit of Dr. Donaldson

Donaldson arrived punctually at two o'clock. He was as calm and precise as ever.

The personality of Donaldson had begun to intrigue me. I had started by regarding him as a rather nondescript young man. I had wondered what a vivid, compelling creature like Theresa could see in him. But I now began to realize that Donaldson was anything but nondescript. Behind that pedantic manner there was ~~more~~ ^{something}.

After our preliminary greetings were over, Donaldson said :

"The reason for my visit is this. I am at a loss to understand exactly what your position is in this matter, M. Poirot."

Poirot replied guardedly :

"You know my profession, I think?"

"Certainly. I may say that I have ~~been~~ ^{been} the trouble to make inquiries about you."

"You are a careful man, Doctor."

Donaldson said drily :

"I like to be sure of my facts."

"You have the scientific mind."

"I may say that all reports on you are the same. You are obviously a very clever man in your profession. You have also the reputation of being a ~~superior~~ ^{superior} and ~~human~~ ^{human} one."

"You are too flattering," murmured Poirot.

"That is why I am at a loss to explain your connection with this affair."

"And yet it is so simple!"

"Hardly that," said Donaldson. "You first present yourself as a writer of biographies."

"A pardonable deception, do you not think? One cannot go everywhere announcing the fact that one is a detective—though that, too, has its uses sometimes."

"So I should imagine." Again Donaldson's tone was dry. "Your next proceeding," he went on, "was to call on Miss Theresa Arundell and represent to her that her aunt's will might conceivably be set aside."

Poirot merely bowed his head in assent.

"That, of course, was ridiculous" Donaldson's voice was sharp. "You knew perfectly well that that will was valid in law and that nothing could be done about it."

"You think that is the case?"

"I am not a fool, M. Poirot—"

"No, Dr. Donaldson, you are certainly not a fool."

"I know something—not very much, but enough—of the law. That will can certainly not be upset. Why did you pretend it could? Clearly for reasons of your own—reasons which Miss Theresa Arundell did not for a moment grasp."

"You seem very certain of her reactions."

A very faint smile passed across the young man's face. He said unexpectedly :

"I know a good deal more about Theresa than she suspects. I have no doubt that she and Charles think they have enlisted your aid in some questionable business. Charles is almost completely amoral. Theresa has a bad heredity and her upbringing has been unfortunate."

"It is thus you speak of your fiancée—as though she was a guinea-pig?"

Donaldson peered at him through his pince-nez.

"I see no occasion to blink the truth. I love Theresa Arundell and I love her for what she is and not for any imagined qualities."

"Do you realize that Theresa Arundell is devoted to

you and that her wish for money is mainly in order that your ambitions should be gratified?"

"Of course I realize it. I've already told you I'm not a fool. But I have no intention of allowing Theresa to embroil herself in any questionable situation on my account. In many ways Theresa is a child still. I am quite capable of furthering my career by my own efforts. I do not say that a substantial legacy would not have been acceptable. It would have been most acceptable. But it would merely have provided a short cut."

"You have, in fact, full confidence in your own abilities?"

"It probably sounds conceited, but I have," said Donaldson composedly.

"Let us proceed, then. I admit that I gained Miss Theresa's confidence by a trick. I let her think that I would be—shall we say, reasonably dishonest—for money. She believed that without the least difficulty."

"Theresa believes that any one would do anything for money," said the young doctor in the same tone one uses when stating a self-evident truth.

"True. That seems to be her attitude—her attitude also."

"Charles probably *would* do anything for money."

"You have no illusions, I see, about your future brother-in-law."

"No. I find him quite an interesting study. There is, I think, some deep-seated neurosis—~~but that is a~~ shop. To return to what we are discussing—I have asked myself *why* you should act in the way you have done, and I have found only one answer. It is clear that you suspect either Theresa or Charles of having a hand in Miss Arundell's death. No, please don't bother to contradict me! Your mention of *estimation* was I think, a mere device to see what reaction you would get. Have you, in actual fact, taken any steps towards getting a Home Office order for *estimation*?"

"I will be quite frank with you. As yet, I have not." Donaldson nodded.

"So I thought. I suppose you have confidence in

possibility that Miss Arundell's death may turn out to be from natural causes?"

"I have considered the fact that it may appear to be so—yes."

"But your own mind is made up?"

"Very definitely. If you have a case of—say—tuberculosis that looks like tuberculosis, behaves like tuberculosis, and in which the blood gives a positive reaction—*eh bien*, you consider it is tuberculosis, do you not?"

"You look at it that way? I see. Then what exactly are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for a final piece of evidence."

The telephone bell rang. At a gesture from Poirot I got up and answered it. I recognized the voice.

"Captain Hastings? This is Mrs. Tanios speaking. Will you tell M. Poirot that he is perfectly right. If he will come here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, I will give him what he wants."

"At ten o'clock to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Right. I'll tell him."

Poirot's eyes asked a question. I nodded.

He turned to Donaldson. His manner had changed. It was brisk—assured.

"Let me make myself clear," he said. "I have diagnosed this case of mine as a case of murder. It looked like murder, it gave all the characteristic reactions of murder—in fact, it *was* murder! Of that, there is not the least doubt."

"Where then does the doubt—for I perceive there is a doubt—lie?"

"The doubt lay in *the identity of the murderer*—but that is a doubt no longer!"

"Really? You know?"

"Let us say that I shall have definite proof in my hands to-morrow."

Dr. Donaldson's eyebrows rose in a slightly ironical fashion.

"Ah," he said. "To-morrow! Sometimes, M. Poirot, to-morrow is a long way off."

"On the contrary," said Poirot, "I always find that it succeeds to-day with monotonous regularity."
Donaldson smiled. He rose.
"I fear I have wasted your time, M. Poirot."
"Not at all. It is always as well to understand each other." With a slight bow, Dr. Donaldson left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Another Victim

"That is a clever man," said Poirot thoughtfully.
"It's rather difficult to know what he is driving at."
"Yes. He is a little inhuman. But extremely perceptive."

"That telephone call was from Mrs. Tanios."

"So I gathered."

I repeated the message. Poirot nodded approval.

"Good. All marches well. Twenty-four hours, Hastings, and I think we shall know exactly where we stand."

"I'm still a little fogged. Who exactly do we suspect?"

"I really could not say who *you* suspect, Hastings! Everybody in turn, I should imagine!"

"Sometimes I think you *like* to get me into that state!"

"No, no. I would not amuse myself in such a way."

"I wouldn't put it past you."

Poirot shook his head, but somewhat absently. I studied him.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked.

"My friend, I am always nervous towards the end of a case. If anything should go wrong—"

"Is anything likely to go wrong?"

"I do not think so." He paused, frowning. "I have, I think, provided against every contingency."

"Then, supposing that we forget crime and go to a show?"

"*Ma foi*, Hastings, that is a good idea."

We passed a very pleasant evening, though I made the

slight mistake of taking Poirot to a crook play. There is one piece of advice I offer to all my readers. Never take a soldier to a military play, a sailor to a naval play, a Scotsman to a Scottish play, a detective to a thriller—and an actor to any play whatsoever! The shower of destructive criticism in each case is somewhat devastating. Poirot never ceased to complain of faulty psychology, and the hero detective's lack of order and method nearly drove him demented. We parted that night with Poirot still explaining how the whole business might have been laid bare in the first half of the first act.

"But in that case, Poirot, there would have been no play," I pointed out.

Poirot was forced to admit that perhaps that was so. It was a few minutes past nine when I entered the sitting-room the next morning. Poirot was at the breakfast-table—as usual neatly slitting open his letters.

The telephone rang and I answered it.

A heavy-breathing female voice spoke :

"Is that M. Poirot? Oh, it's you, Captain Hastings."

There was a sort of gasp and a sob.

"Is that Miss Lawson?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, such a terrible thing has happened!"

I grasped the receiver tightly.

"What is it?"

"She left the Wellington, you know—Bella, I mean. I went there late in the afternoon yesterday and they said she'd left. Without a word to me, either! *Most* extraordinary! It makes me feel that perhaps, after all, Dr. Tanios was *right*. He spoke so *nicely* about her and seemed so *distressed*, and now it really looks as though he were right after all."

"But what's happened, Miss Lawson? Is it just that Mrs. Tanios left the hotel without telling you?"

"Oh, no, it's not *that*! Oh, dear me, no. If that were all it would be *quite* all right. Though I do think it was *odd*, you know. Dr. Tanios did say that he was afraid she wasn't quite—not *quite*—if you know what I mean. Persecution mania, he called it."

"Yes." (Damn the woman!) "But what's *happened*?"

"Oh, dear—it is terrible. Died in her sleep. An overdose of some sleeping stuff! And those *poor* little children! It all seems so dreadfully *sad*! I've done nothing but cry since I heard."

"How did you hear? Tell me all about it."

Out of the tail of my eye I noticed that Poirot had stopped opening his letters. He was listening to my side of the conversation. I did not like to cede my place to him. If I did it seemed highly probable that Miss Lawson would start with lamentations all over again.

"They rang me up. From the hotel. The Coniston it's called. It seems they found my name and address in her bag. Oh, dear, M. Poirot—Captain Hastings, I mean—*isn't it terrible?* Those poor little children left motherless."

"Look here," I said. "Are you sure it's an accident? They didn't think it could be suicide?"

"Oh, what a *dreadful* idea, Captain Hastings! Oh, dear, I don't know, I'm sure. Do you think it could be? That would be *dreadful*! Of course she *did* seem very depressed. But she needn't have been. I mean there wouldn't have been any difficulty about *money*. I was going to *share* with her—indeed I was! Dear Miss Arundell would have wished it. I'm sure of that! It seems so awful to think of her taking her own life—but perhaps she didn't.... The hotel people seemed to think it was an accident."

"What did she take?"

"One of those sleeping things. Veronal, I think. No, chloral. Yes, that was it. Chloral. Oh, dear, Captain Hastings, do you think—"

Unceremoniously I banged down the receiver. I turned to Poirot.

"Mrs. Tanios—"

He raised a hand.

"Yes, yes, I know what you are going to say. She is dead, is she not?"

"Yes. Overdose of sleeping-draught. Chloral." Poirot got up.

"Come, Hastings, we must go there at *once*."

"Is this what you feared—last night? When you said you were always nervous towards the end of a case?"

"I feared another death—yes."

Poirot's face was set and stern. We said very little as we drove towards Euston. Once or twice Poirot shook his head.

I said timidly :

"You don't think—? Could it be an accident?"

"No, Hastings—no. It was not an accident."

"How on earth did he find out where she had gone?"

Poirot only shook his head without replying.

The Coniston was an unsavoury-looking place quite near Euston station. Poirot, with his card, and a suddenly bullying manner, soon fought his way into the manager's office.

The facts were quite simple.

Mrs. Peters, as she had called herself, and her two children had arrived about half-past twelve. They had had lunch at one o'clock.

At four o'clock a man had arrived with a note for Mrs. Peters. The note had been sent up to her. A few minutes later she had come down with the two children and a suitcase. The children had then left with the visitor. Mrs. Peters had gone to the office and explained that she should only want the one room after all.

She had not appeared exceptionally distressed or upset, indeed she had seemed quite calm and collected. She had had dinner about seven-thirty and had gone to her room soon afterwards.

On calling her in the morning the chambermaid had found her dead.

A doctor had been sent for and had pronounced her to have been dead for some hours. An empty glass was found on the table by the bed. It seemed fairly obvious that she had taken a sleeping-draught, and, by mistake, taken an overdose. Chloral hydrate, the doctor said, was a somewhat uncertain drug. There were no indications of suicide. No letter had been left. Searching for means of notifying her relations, Miss Lawson's

name and address had been found and she had been communicated with by telephone.

Poirot asked if anything had been found in the way of letters or papers. The letter, for instance, brought by the man who had called for the children.

No papers of any kind had been found, the man said, but there was a pile of charred paper on the hearth.

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

As far as any one could say, Mrs. Peters had had no visitors and no one had come to her room—with the solitary exception of the man who had called for the two children.

I questioned the porter myself as to his appearance, but the man was very vague. A man of medium height—he thought fair-haired—rather military build—of somewhat nondescript appearance. No, he was positive the man had no beard.

"It wasn't Tanios," I murmured to Poirot.

"My dear Hastings! Do you really believe that Mrs. Tanios, after all the trouble she was taking to get the children away from their father, would quite meekly hand them over to him without the least fuss or protest? Ah, that, no!"

"Then who was the man?"

"Clearly it was some one in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence or rather it was some one sent by a third person in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence."

"A man of medium height," I mused.

"You need hardly trouble yourself about his appearance, Hastings. I am quite sure that the man who actually called for the children was some quite unimportant personage. The real agent kept himself in the background!"

"And the note was from this third person?"

"Yes."

"Some one in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence?"

"Obviously."

"And the note is now burnt?"

"Yes, she was instructed to burn it."

"What about that résumé of the case that you gave her?"

Poirot's face looked unusually grim.

"That, too, is burned. But that does not matter!"

"No?"

"No. For you see—it is all in the head of Hercule Poirot."

He took me by the arm.

"Come, Hastings, let us leave here. Our concern is not with the dead but with the living. It is with them we have to deal."

CHAPTER XXIX

Inquest at Littlegreen House

It was eleven o'clock the following morning.

Seven people were assembled at Littlegreen House. Hercule Poirot stood by the mantelpiece. Charles and Theresa Arundell were on the sofa, Charles on the arm of it with his hand on Theresa's shoulder. Dr. Tanios sat in a grandfather chair. His eyes were red-rimmed and he wore a black band round his arm.

On an upright chair by a round table sat the owner of the house, Miss Lawson. She, too, had red eyes. Her hair was even untidier than usual. Dr. Donaldson sat directly facing Poirot. His face was quite expressionless.

My interest quickened as I looked at each face in turn.

In the course of my association with Poirot I had assisted at many such a scene. A little company of people, all outwardly composed with well-bred masks for faces. And I had seen Poirot strip the mask from one face and show it for what it was—the face of a killer!

Yes, there was no doubt of it. *One of these people was a murderer!* But which? Even now I was not sure.

Poirot cleared his throat—a little pompously as was his habit—and began to speak.

"We are assembled here, ladies and gentlemen, to inquire into the death of Emily Arundell on the first of May last. There are four possibilities—that she died

naturally—that she died as the result of an accident—that she took her own life—or lastly that she met her death at the hands of some person known or unknown.

"No inquest was held at the time of her death, since it was assumed that she died from natural causes and a medical certificate to that effect was given by Dr. Grainger.

"In a case where suspicion arises after burial has taken place it is usual to exhume the body of the person in question. There are reasons why I have not advocated that course. The chief of them is that my client would not have liked it."

It was Dr. Donaldson who interrupted. He said :
"Your client?"

Poirot turned to him. "My client is Miss Emily Arundell. I am acting for her. Her greatest desire was that there should be no scandal."

I will pass over the next ten minutes, since it would involve much needless repetition. Poirot told of the letter he had received, and producing it he read it aloud. He went on to explain the steps he had taken on coming to Market Basing, and of his discovery of the means taken to bring about the accident.

Then he paused, cleared his throat once more, and went on :

"I am now going to take you over the ground I travelled to get at the truth. I am going to show you what I believe to be a true reconstruction of the facts of the case.

"To begin with, it is necessary to picture exactly what passed in Miss Arundell's mind. That, I think, is fairly easy. She has a fall, her fall is supposed to be occasioned by a dog's ball, but *she herself knows better*. Lying there on her bed her active and shrewd mind goes over the circumstances of her fall and she comes to a very definite conclusion about it. Some one has deliberately tried to injure—perhaps to kill her.

"From that conclusion she passes to a consideration of who that person can be. There were *seven* people in the house—four guests, her companion and two servants. Of these seven people only one can be entirely

exonerated—since to that one person no advantage could accrue. She does not seriously suspect the two servants, both of whom have been with her for many years and whom she knows to be devoted to her. There remain, then, *four* persons, three of them members of her family, and one of them a connection by marriage. *Each of those four persons benefits, three directly, one indirectly, by her death.*

"She is in a difficult position, since she is a woman with a strong sense of family feeling. Essentially she is not one who wishes to wash the dirty linen in public, as the saying goes. On the other hand, she is not one to submit tamely to attempted murder!

"She takes her decision and writes to me. She also takes a further step. That further step was, I believe, actuated by two motives. One, I think, was a distant feeling of *spite* against her entire family! She suspected them all impartially, and she determined at all costs to score off them! The second and more reasoned motive was a wish to protect herself and a realization of how this could be accomplished. As you know, she wrote to her lawyer, Mr. Purvis, and directed him to draw up a will in favour of the one person in the house who, she felt convinced, could have had no hand in her accident.

"Now I may say that, from the terms of her letter to me and from her subsequent actions, I am quite sure that Miss Arundell passed from *indefinite* suspicion of four people to *definite* suspicion of *one* of those four. The whole tenor of her letter to me is an insistence that this business must be kept strictly private, since the honour of the family is involved.

"I think that, from a Victorian point of view, this means that a person of *her* own name was indicated—and preferably a *man*.

"If she had suspected Mrs. Tanios she would have been quite as anxious to secure her own safety, but not quite as concerned for the family honour. She might have felt much the same about Theresa Arundell, but not nearly as intensely as she would feel about Charles.

"Charles was an Arundell. He bore the name."

Her reasons for suspecting him seem quite plain. To begin with, she had no illusions about Charles. He had come near to disgracing the family once before. This time, is, she knew him to be not only a gentleman but a criminal! He had already forged her name as a step towards forgery—a step further—murder.

"Also she had had a somewhat suggestive conversation with him only two days before her death. He had asked her for money and she had refused. She had thereupon remarked—oh, lightly enough—'You are not going the right way to get money.' To this, we are told, he had responded that she could not be too sure.' And two days later the murder takes place.

"It is hardly to be wondered at that she was brooding over the occurrence. Miss Arundell was convinced to the conclusion that it was Charles who had made an attempt upon her life.

"The sequence of events is generally as follows: conversation with Charles. The murder. The discovery of the will. On the following Tuesday, the lawyer brings the will and she signs it.

"Charles and Theresa finished their marriage during the week-end and Miss Arundell took the necessary steps to safeguard herself. She signed the will. She not only signed it but she gave it to him! That is the end of the story. She is making it clear that she is a woman who would bring her husband to justice.

"She probably thought that Charles was guilty. Why? I fancy that he was. He was guilty! He believed that it was his duty to do it. He had been made. He was a man who had really been helped. Either the serious crime or the more serious crime.

for his reluctance. He said nothing, hoping that his aunt would relent and change her mind.

"As far as Miss Arundell's state of mind was concerned I felt that I had reconstructed events with a fair amount of correctness. I had next to make up my mind if her suspicions were, in actual fact, justified.

"Just as she had done, I realized that my suspicions were limited to a narrow circle—seven people to be exact. Charles and Theresa Arundell, Dr. Tanios and Mrs. Tanios, the two servants, and Miss Lawson. There was an eighth person who had to be taken into account—namely, Dr. Donaldson, who dined there that night, but I did not learn of his presence until later.

"These seven persons that I was considering fell easily into two categories. Six of them stood to benefit in a greater or lesser degree by Miss Arundell's death. If any one of those six had committed the crime the reason was probably a plain matter of *gain*. The second category contained one person only—Miss Lawson. Miss Lawson did *not* stand to gain by Miss Arundell's death, but *as a result of the accident*, she did benefit considerably *later*!

"That meant that if Miss Lawson staged the so-called accident—"

"I never did anything of the kind!" Miss Lawson interrupted. "It's disgraceful! Standing up there and saying such things!"

"A little patience, mademoiselle. And be kind enough not to interrupt," said Poirot.

Miss Lawson tossed her head angrily.

"I insist on making my protest! Disgraceful, that's what it is! Disgraceful!"

Poirot went on, unheeding.

"I was saying that *if* Miss Lawson staged that accident she did so for an entirely *different* reason—that is, she engineered it so that Miss Arundell *would naturally suspect her own family and become alienated from them*. That *was* a possibility! I searched to see if there were any confirmation or otherwise and I unearthed one very definite fact. If Miss Lawson wanted Miss Arundell

to suspect her own family, she would have stressed the fact of the dog, Bob, being *out* that night. But on the contrary Miss Lawson took the utmost pains to *prevent* Miss Arundell hearing of that. Therefore, I argued, Miss Lawson *must* be innocent."

Miss Lawson said sharply :

"I should hope so!"

"I next considered the problem of Miss Arundell's death. If one attempt to murder a person is made, a second attempt usually follows. It seemed to me significant that within a fortnight of the first attempt Miss Arundell should have died. I began to make inquiries.

"Dr. Grainger did not seem to think there was anything unusual about his patient's death. That was a little damping to my theory. But, inquiring into the happenings of the last evening before she was taken ill, I came across a rather significant fact. Miss Isabel Tripp mentioned a halo of light that had appeared round Miss Arundell's head. Her sister confirmed her statement. They might, of course, be inventing—in a romantic spirit—but I did not think that the incident was quite a likely one to occur to them unprompted. When questioning Miss Lawson she also gave me an interesting piece of information. She referred to a luminous ribbon issuing from Miss Arundell's mouth and forming a luminous haze round her head.

"Obviously, though described somewhat differently by two different observers, the actual *fact* was the same. What it amounted to, shorn of spiritualistic significance, was this : *On the night in question Miss Arundell's breath was phosphorescent!*"

Dr. Donaldson moved a little in his chair.

Poirot nodded to him.

"Yes, you begin to see. There are not very many phosphorescent substances. The first and most common one gave me exactly what I was looking for. I will read you a short extract from an article on phosphorus poisoning.

"*The person's breath may be phosphorescent before he*

feels in any way affected. That is what Miss Lawson and the Misses Tripp saw in the dark—Miss Arundell's phosphorescent breath—'a luminous haze.' And here I will read you again. *The jaundice having thoroughly pronounced itself, the system may be considered as not only under the influence of the toxic action of phosphorus, but as suffering in addition from all the accidents incidental to the retention of the biliary secretion in the blood, nor is there from this point any special difference between phosphorus poisoning and certain affections of the liver—such for example as yellow atrophy.*

"You see the cleverness of that? Miss Arundell has suffered for years from liver trouble. The symptoms of phosphorus poisoning would only look like *another attack of the same complaint.* There will be nothing new, nothing startling about it.

"Oh! it was well planned! Foreign matches—vermin paste? It is not difficult to get hold of phosphorus, and a very small dose will kill. The medicinal dose is from 1/100 to 1/30 grain.

"*Voilà.* How clear—how marvellously clear the whole business becomes! Naturally, the doctor is deceived—especially as I find his sense of smell is affected—the garlic odour of the breath is a distinct symptom of phosphorus poisoning. He had no suspicions—why should he have? There were no suspicious circumstances and the one thing that might have given him a hint was the one thing he would never hear—or if he did hear it he would only class it as spiritualistic nonsense.

"I was now sure (from the evidence of Miss Lawson and the Misses Tripp) that murder had been committed. The question still was by *whom?* I eliminated the servants—their mentality was obviously not adapted to such a crime. I eliminated Miss Lawson, since she would hardly have prattled on about luminous ectoplasm if she had been connected with the crime. I eliminated Charles Arundell, *since he knew, having seen the will, that he would gain nothing by his aunt's death.*

"There remained his sister Theresa, Dr. Tanios, Mrs. Tanios and Dr. Donaldson, whom I discovered to

have been dining in the house on the evening of the dog's ball incident.

"At this point I had very little to help me. I had to fall back upon the psychology of the crime and the personality of the murderer. Both crimes had roughly the same outline. They were both simple. They were cunning, and carried out with efficiency. They required a certain amount of knowledge but not a great deal. The facts about phosphorus poisoning are easily learned, and the stuff itself, as I say, is quite easily obtained, especially abroad.

"I considered first the two men. Both of them were doctors, and both were clever men. Either of them might have thought of phosphorus and its suitability in this particular case, but the incident of the dog's ball did not seem to fit a masculine mind. The incident of the ball seemed to me essentially a woman's idea.

"I considered first of all Theresa Arundell. She had certain potentialities. She was bold, ruthless, and not over-scrupulous. She had led a selfish and greedy life. She had always had everything she wanted and she had reached a point where she was desperate for money—both for herself and for the man she loved. Her manner, also, showed plainly that she knew her aunt had been murdered.

"There was an interesting little passage between her and her brother. I conceived the idea that *each suspected the other of the crime*. Charles endeavoured to make her say that *she knew of the existence of the new will*. Why? Clearly because if she knew of it she could not be suspected of the murder. She, on the other hand, clearly did not believe Charles's statement that Miss Arundell had shown it to him! She regarded it as a singularly clumsy attempt on his part to divert suspicion from himself.

"There was another significant point. Charles displayed a reluctance to use the word 'arsenic.' Later I found that he had questioned the old gardener at length upon the strength of some weed-killer. It was clear what had been in his mind."

Charles Arundell shifted his position a little.

"I thought of it," he said. "But—well, I suppose I hadn't got the nerve."

Poirot nodded at him.

"Precisely, *it is not in your psychology*. Your crimes will always be the crimes of weakness. To steal, to forge—yes, it is the easiest way—but to kill—*no!* To kill one needs the type of mind that can be obsessed by an idea."

He resumed his lecturing manner.

"Theresa Arundell, I decided, had quite sufficient strength of mind to carry such a design through, but there were other facts to take into consideration. She had never been thwarted, she had lived fully and selfishly—but that type of person is *not the type that kills*—except perhaps in sudden anger. And yet—I felt sure—it was *Theresa Arundell who had taken the weed-killer from the tin*."

Theresa spoke suddenly :

"I'll tell you the truth. I thought of it. I actually took some weed-killer from a tin down at Littlegreen House. But I couldn't do it! I'm too fond of living—of being alive—I couldn't do that to any one—take life from them.... I may be bad and selfish but there are things I can't do! I couldn't kill a living, breathing, human creature!"

Poirot nodded. "No, that is true. And you are not as bad as you paint yourself, mademoiselle. You are only young—and reckless."

He went on :

"There remained Mrs. Tanios. As soon as I saw her I realized that she was afraid. She saw that I realized that and she very quickly made capital out of that momentary betrayal. She gave a very convincing portrait of a woman *who is afraid for her husband*. A little later she changed her tactics. It was very cleverly done—but the change did not deceive me. A woman can be afraid *for* her husband or she can be afraid *of* her husband—but she can hardly be *both*. Mrs. Tanios decided on the latter rôle—and she played her part cleverly—even to coming out after me into the hall of the hotel and pretend-

ing that there was something she wanted to tell me. When her husband followed her as she knew he would, she pretended that she could not speak before him.

"I realized at once, not that she feared her husband, but that she disliked him. And at once, summing the matter up, I felt convinced that here was the exact character I had been looking for. Here was—not a self-indulgent woman—but a thwarted one. A plain girl, leading a dull existence, unable to attract the men she would like to attract, finally accepting a man she did not care for rather than be left an old maid. I could trace her growing dissatisfaction with life, her life in Smyrna exiled from all she cared for in life. Then the birth of her children and her passionate attachment to them.

"Her husband was devoted to her, but she came secretly to dislike him more and more. He had speculated with her money and lost it—another grudge against him.

"There was only one thing that illumined her drab life, the expectation of her Aunt Emily's death. Then she would have money, independence, the means to educate her children as she wished—and remember education meant a lot to her—she was a professor's daughter!

"She may have already planned the crime, or had the idea of it in her mind, before she came to England. She had a certain knowledge of chemistry, having assisted her father in the laboratory. She knew the nature of Miss Arundell's complaint and she was well aware that phosphorus would be an ideal substance for her purpose.

"Then, when she came to Littlegreen House, a simpler method presented itself to her. The dog's ball—a thread or string across the top of the stairs. A simple, ingenious woman's idea.

"She made her attempt—and failed. I do not think that she had any idea that Miss Arundell was aware of the true facts of the matter. Miss Arundell's suspicions were directed entirely against Charles. I doubt if her manner to Bella showed any alteration. And so, quietly and determinedly, this self-contained, unhappy, ambitious woman put her original plan into execution. She found an excellent vehicle for the poison, some patent capsules

that Miss Arundell was in the habit of taking after meals. To open a capsule, place the phosphorus inside and close it again, was child's play. The capsule was replaced among the others. Sooner or later Miss Arundell would swallow it. Poison was not likely to be suspected. Even if by some unlikely chance it was, she herself would be nowhere near Market Basing at the time.

"Yet she took one precaution. She obtained a double supply of chloral hydrate at the chemist's, forging her husband's name to the prescription. I have no doubt of what that was for—to keep by her in case anything went wrong.

"As I say, I was convinced from the first moment I saw her that Mrs. Tanios was the person I was looking for, but I had absolutely no *proof* of the fact. I had to proceed carefully. If Mrs. Tanios had any idea I suspected her, I was afraid that she might proceed to a further crime. Furthermore, I believed that the idea of the crime had already occurred to her. Her one wish in life was to shake herself free of her husband.

"Her original murder had proved a bitter disappointment. The money, the wonderful all-intoxicating money had all gone to Miss Lawson! It was a blow, but she set to work most intelligently. She began to work on Miss Lawson's conscience which, I suspect, was already not too comfortable."

There was a sudden outburst of sobs. Miss Lawson took out her handkerchief and cried into it.

"It's been dreadful," she sobbed. "I've been wicked. Very wicked. You see, I was very curious about the will—why Miss Arundell had made a new one, I mean. And one day, when Miss Arundell was resting, I managed to unlock the drawer in the desk. And then I found she'd left it all to *me*! Of course, I never dreamed it was so *much*. Just a few thousands—that's all I thought it was. And why not? After all, her own relations didn't really *care* for her! But then, when she was so ill, she asked for the will. I could see—I felt sure—she was going to destroy it.... And that's when I was so wicked. I told her she'd sent it back to Mr. Purvis. Poor dear

Miss Lawson told me that she had seen Theresa Arundell kneeling on the stairs on the night of Easter Monday. I soon discovered that Miss Lawson could not have seen Theresa at all clearly—not nearly clearly enough to recognize her *features*. Yet she was quite positive in her identification. On being pressed she mentioned a brooch with Theresa's initials—T.A.

"On my request Miss Theresa Arundell showed me the brooch in question. At the same time she absolutely denied having been on the stairs at the time stated. At first I fancied some one else had borrowed her brooch, but when I looked at the brooch in the glass the truth leaped at me. Miss Lawson, waking up, had seen a dim figure with the initials T.A. flashing in the light. She had leapt to the conclusion that it was Theresa.

"But if in the glass she had seen the initials T.A.—then the real initials must have been A.T., since the glass naturally reversed the order.

"Of course! Mrs. Tanios's mother was Arabella Arundell. Bella is only a contraction. A.T. stood for Arabella Tanios. There was nothing odd in Mrs. Tanios possessing a similar type of brooch. It had been exclusive last Christmas, but by the spring they were all the rage, and I had already observed that Mrs. Tanios copied her cousin Theresa's hats and clothes as far as she was able with her limited means.

"In my own mind, at any rate, my case was proved.

"Now—what was I to do? Obtain a Home Office order for the exhumation of the body? That could doubtless be managed. I *might* prove that Miss Arundell had been poisoned with phosphorus, though there was a little doubt about that. The body had been buried two months, and I understand that there have been cases of phosphorus poisoning where no lesions have been found and where the post-mortem appearances are very indecisive. Even then, could I connect Mrs. Tanios with the purchase or possession of phosphorus? Very doubtful, since she had probably obtained it abroad.

"At this juncture Mrs. Tanios took a decisive action. She left her husband, throwing herself on the pity of

Miss Lawson. She also definitely accused her husband of the murder.

"Unless I acted I felt convinced that he would be her next victim. I took steps to isolate them one from the other on the pretext that it was for her safety. She could not very well contradict that. Really, it was *his* safety I had in mind. And then—and then—"

He paused—a long pause. His face had gone rather white.

"But that was only a temporary measure. I had to make sure that the killer would kill no more. I had to assure the safety of the innocent.

"So I wrote out my construction of the case and gave it to Mrs. Tanios."

There was a long silence.

Dr. Tanios cried out :

"Oh, my God, so that's why she killed herself."

Poirot said gently :

"Was it not the best way? She thought so. There were, you see, the children to consider."

Dr. Tanios buried his face in his hands.

Poirot came forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It had to be. Believe me it was necessary. There would have been more deaths. First yours—then possibly, under certain circumstances, Miss Lawson's. And so it goes on."

He paused.

In a broken voice Tanios said :

"She wanted me—to take a sleeping-draught one night... There was something in her face—I threw it away. That was when I began to believe her mind was going...."

"Think of it that way. It is indeed partly true. But not in the legal meaning of the term. She knew the meaning of her action...."

Dr. Tanios said wistfully :

"She was much too good for me—always."

A strange epitaph on a self-confessed murderess!

CHAPTER XXX

The Last Word

There is very little more to tell.

Theresa married her doctor shortly afterwards. I know them fairly well now and I have learnt to appreciate Donaldson—his clarity of vision and the deep, underlying force and humanity of the man. His manner, I may say, is just as dry and precise as ever; Theresa often mimics him to his face. She is, I think, amazingly happy and absolutely wrapped up in her husband's career. He is already making a big name for himself and is an authority on the functions of ductless glands.

Miss Lawson, in an acute attack of conscience, had to be restrained forcibly from denuding herself of every penny. A settlement agreeable to all parties was ran up by Mr. Purvis whereby Miss Arundell's fortune was shared out between Miss Lawson, the two Arundells and the Tanios children.

Charles went through his share in a little over a year and is now, I believe, in British Columbia.

Just two incidents.

"You're a downy fellow, ain't you?" said Miss Peabody, stopping us as we emerged from the gate of Little-green House one day. "Managed to hush everything up! No exhumation. Everything done decently."

"There seems to be no doubt that Miss Arundell died of yellow atrophy of the liver," said Poirot gently.

"That's very satisfactory," said Miss Peabody. "Bella Tanios took an overdose of sleeping stuff, I hear."

"Yes, it was very sad."

"She was a miserable kind of woman—always wanting what she hadn't got. People go a bit queer sometimes when they're like that. Had a kitchen maid once. Same thing. Plain girl. Felt it. Started writing anonymous letters. Queer kinks people get. Ah, well, I dare say it's all for the best."

"One hopes so, madame. One hopes so."

"Well," said Miss Peabody, preparing to resume her walk, "I'll say this for you. You've hushed things up nicely. Very nicely indeed."

She walked on.

There was a plaintive "Wuff" behind me.

I turned and opened the gate.

"Come on, old man."

Bob bounced through. There was a ball in his mouth.

"You can't take that for a walk."

Bob sighed, turned and slowly ejected the ball inside the gate. He looked at it anxiously, then passed through.

He looked up at me.

"If you say so, master, I suppose it's all right."

I drew a long breath.

"My word, Poirot, it's good to have a dog again."

"The spoils of war," said Poirot. "But I would remind you, my friend, that it was to *me* that Miss Lawson presented Bob, not to *you*."

"Possibly," I said. "But you're not really any good with a dog, Poirot. You don't understand dog psychology! Now Bob and I understand each other perfectly, don't we?"

"Wuff," said Bob in energetic assent.

"Very few detective stories baffle me nowadays, but Mr. Carr's always do,"

says Agatha Christie

JOHN DICKSON CARR'S

The Black Spectacles

Challenged for maintaining that most people are incapable of describing accurately what they see, Martin Chesney stages a test show, which is recorded by cine-camera; but when it ends he lies dead. Of three persons who saw him murdered, not one can tell what has actually happened—or who is the man in black spectacles. Dr. Fell, summoned to investigate this climax to a series of poisonings, is only just in time to discover how the murderer could be in two places simultaneously. (1/6)

To Wake the Dead

Standing hungrily in Piccadilly one snowy morning without a penny, Christopher Kent catches a numbered card floating down from an hotel. He enters, gives a waiter that room number and has breakfast. An unlucky chance compels him to go up to the room. On the door-handle hangs a card on which is scrawled "Dead Woman." The murder mystery, thus begun, taxes the brains of the police, and it is only with Dr. Fell's help that the intricate problem is solved. (1/6)

THESE ARE PAN BOOKS

Murder in a Hall of Armour

CARTER DICKSON'S

The Bowstring Murders

" Carter Dickson " is a pseudonym of John Dickson Carr (two of whose detective-stories are listed on the previous page). This novel tells the thrilling story of murders in a strange English castle in which is a vast, dark hall filled with medieval arms and armour. The eccentric Lord Rayle is found dead beneath the figure of a gigantic war-horse. The plot is constructed with great ingenuity. (1/6)

Brilliant Tale of a Murderess

SHELLEY SMITH'S

Come and Be Killed

Soon Shayne made out a massive stone wall on their left, about as high as a professional basketball center taking a rebound.

"I remember something," Vivienne said suddenly. "Wait. When the gate opens, a bell rings at the house."

"Easy enough," Powys said. "We go over the wall, eh, Mike?"

He spotted a break in the vegetation. Coming to a halt, he got out to try the ground. Satisfied, he returned to the Morris, cut the wheels sharply, and backed off the road as far as he could, stopping only when the rear wheels began to spin. He killed the motor and set the emergency. All three then set to work breaking branches to conceal the little car.

"What do you think about our mademoiselle?" Powys said. "Can we count on her not to drive away and leave us?"

"Sure," Shayne replied with a grin. "I convinced her. And just to be on the safe side, let's take the keys."

"You don't mean you are going to leave me here in the jungle!" she exclaimed. "All by myself?"

"We'll be back."

"Michael!" she said pleadingly. "You don't know what you are saying. There are wild animals."

"If I worried about anybody," Shayne said, "I'd be worrying about the animals."

"It is nothing to joke about!"

Powys laughed, but then said seriously, "No, you're right. Get in the car and run up the windows. Then even the snakes can't get in."

"Snakes!" she said in horror. "You, you—you—"

He held the branches aside for her. After she was in the car, he let them fall back in place. "All right?"

Her voice seemed small and far away. "But for the love of God, hurry."

"All the same," he said in a low voice to Shayne,

"this may not be so simple. I don't suppose you have a gun?"

"They have enough guns to go around," Shayne said.

"Expect you're right," Powys said doubtfully as they crossed the road. "I'll give you a leg up. Mind there's no broken glass on the top."

He backed up against the stone wall and made a foothold with his hands. "I had Commando training, actually. Never thought it would come in handy. Just keep your foot out of my face, will you?"

Shayne put his toe on the Englishman's hands and sprang upward. He swept his hand across the top of the wall without meeting any obstacles, and came back to the ground.

"No glass, at least."

Powys flexed his fingers. "Next time I'm going to pick somebody who weighs less. Here we go."

Shayne gripped the Englishman's shoulders, placed his foot, and went up onto the wall in one smooth flow of motion. He swung his legs up and reached down for Powys' hand. The Englishman backed away a few steps, threw himself toward the wall and seized Shayne's hand.

The redhead felt a stab go through his chest, as though a sliver of glass was being driven between his ribs. He held on and pulled, and Powys came up the wall. For an instant, until he threw his free arm over the top, his full weight seemed to bear on the break in Shayne's ribs. He scrambled up beside Shayne, and the two men dropped to the ground together. Shayne had to prop himself against the solid bulk of the wall or he would have fallen. His lips were drawn back as he fought the pain.

"Anything wrong, Mike?" Powys said.

Shayne grunted and pushed off from the wall. He saw the lighted house ahead, several hundred yards away, but instead of heading for it directly, across uncertain

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ground, they followed the wall to the gate. Then they went up the drive, single file on the turf at the edge of the gravel.

The house was lit up like a beacon. It was all on one level, of brick and glass. On the far side, the ground dropped away steeply, and in daylight there was probably a fine view across the mountains from the flagstone terrace. The rooms were like separate stage sets, each flooded with light. A man's figure crossed in front of one of the windows, and Shayne instinctively crouched, although he knew they couldn't be seen. The drive curved on around the house, ending at a three-car garage. One of the cars Shayne had seen at the Half Moon had been run into the garage, but the overhead door had not been closed. The second car was parked outside on the gravel. A cab, probably the one that had brought Paul Slater from the airport, was standing at the front steps.

Shayne pointed at the cars and made a wringing motion with both hands. The Englishman nodded. Keeping below the level of the terrace, he made his way quietly to the cab, unlatched the hood, and lifted it carefully, so he could get to the motor. Shayne heard a small rring sound. Powys threw something into the darkness, lowered the hood, and moved on.

A radio somewhere in the house, turned up too high, was playing American music. Crouching, Shayne ran to the stone balustrade at the edge of the side terrace. After a moment, very cautiously, he raised his head. Standing in a lighted bedroom, on the opposite side of a large picture window, Martha Slater was looking directly at him.

It took Shayne an instant to realize that she couldn't see him. She was holding a lighted cigarette, and she looked very tired. The shoulder of her blouse was torn. She turned and walked away, going out of sight and then coming back.

There were two men in the room with her. One was

on the bed, and Shayne saw, with an involuntary tightening of his stomach muscles, that it was José. He was watching Martha. As she moved, a kind of hunger glittered in his small eyes. The other man was in a straight chair tipped back against the door. Shayne raised his head a little more. It was the moon-faced youth whose name Shayne didn't know. He was paring his fingernails lazily with a long knife.

Martha said something which Shayne couldn't hear. José laughed scornfully.

Shayne pulled at his earlobe. Before he could make his move, he had to know where all his enemies were located and what they were doing. He ducked down below the balustrade and eased on to the next room. This was a much smaller bedroom. The cab driver, wearing an impromptu uniform, was sitting at his ease in an upholstered chair with one leg over the chair-arm, smoking a long cigar. He had a tall iced drink in his hand. The radio was at his elbow, with a choice of Caribbean or North American music. Outside, his meter was ticking off waiting time. There was a wonderful look of contentment on his face.

The redhead grinned ruefully and continued his careful survey of the house. There was a bathroom and then another bedroom, both of which seemed to be empty. That brought him to the front terrace. To see into the front windows he would have had to cross the terrace, so he backed off into the darkness and retraced his steps.

The kitchen was empty. Powys was not in evidence; Shayne could hear faint metallic noises from the garage, where he was putting the third car out of action. Passing the garage, the redhead looked into the dining room. Al, the bartender, was playing solitaire at a long table. He was in his shirt sleeves, and he was wearing his big gun in a shoulder holster. That was the gun Shayne was chiefly concerned about. He was about to move on when

he noticed something else. Al was turning up one card at a time, but he wasn't adding any of them to the red-and-black pattern spread out on the table in front of him. Instead, while he kept his hands moving, he was leaning back in his chair, listening intently. A folding door was pulled shut behind him.

Shayne went on, around a clump of flowering shrubs. He saw the Camel in the living room, and a moment later he saw a man who must be Slater. That left only two unaccounted for—José's brother Pedro and the caretaker Alvarez had mentioned.

Slater was speaking angrily. He was boyishly good-looking, but there was a weakness and a petulance around his mouth, an unbecoming fleshiness of the neck and chin. The redhead was too far away to catch more than an occasional word. He studied the situation.

The Camel was on one side of a large stone fireplace, Slater on the other, continuing his harangue. Slater stalked to the big front window. The Camel followed him with his eyes. Now they were both in profile to Shayne, and the redhead quickly vaulted the balustrade, dropping without a sound onto the terrace. Slater's voice rose and Alvarez broke in on him. Both men were fully taken up with each other. Shayne crawled in against the building, beneath the window level, and around to the front terrace. Here he could hear the voices plainly. There was a soft scraping behind him and Powys wriggled around the corner. The Englishman winked solemnly, and made a sign that the cars were out of commission.

"And if you are not the villain who raised this bump on my head, dear Paul," the Camel's voice said calmly, "I make it a condition that you tell me who did. I think that is reasonable."

Powys tugged at Shayne's ankle and formed the word "Alvarez" with his lips. Shayne nodded.

"I don't accept that," Slater answered. "It's unreasonable as hell. I'm not your keeper. Do you expect me to make a list of all the people who have a good reason for wanting to beat your brains out? The woods are full of them."

"Perhaps," the Camel said. "The point is, you see, that the appointment was made in the usual way."

"On a radio schedule?" Slater said sharply.

"Precisely! It came in the afternoon mail. With a circle around eleven o'clock."

Shayne would have liked to see Slater's face, but it would have been too risky to raise his head.

"I swear to God, Luis," Slater said fervently. "I don't know how it happened. Nobody knew that trick but me. You're not the world's most cautious man. One of your monkeys must have seen it on your desk one of the other times, and put two and two together. I can see how you figure, but you're absolutely wrong. I didn't do it, god-damn it!" And he added in a low voice, "But if you want to know something funny, I almost wish I had."

"Is that funny?" the Camel said dryly. "Your sense of humor is a little deficient, I think. Let us be specific. I was twenty minutes late, through no fault of my own. Where were you between five minutes of eleven and twenty minutes past? Give me the names of two impartial witnesses who can assure me that you were not in a garage waiting for me to arrive so you could knock me on the head, and perhaps you will succeed in convincing me."

Slater didn't respond at once. Then he said heavily, "You don't want much, do you? Between five of eleven and twenty after I was doing something dumb. I left the hotel at ten-thirty and I didn't get to the airport till quarter of twelve. I suppose I picked up the taxi at about eleven-thirty, but before then I was taking pains not to be seen by anybody. And for a good reason. I sneaked out

and put some of the money I made on my last trip in the mailbox of Mrs. Albert Watts."

There was an expressive silence.

"I know it was dumb," Slater said miserably. "You don't have to tell me."

"Dumb! It was insane! What if somebody saw you? Did you think about that?"

"Nobody saw me. It took time, but I was careful."

"And why did you feel prompted to do this crazy thing? You are ill, my friend. It is as good as a signed confession."

"Aah—I was feeling lousy, Luis. She's pathetic. I snowed her once at a dance, and I've been feeling bad about it ever since. It wasn't her fault that Watts wanted to make himself a dirty buck by turning me in. I could have mailed it to her, but they might have traced it to me. This way was better."

"It isn't good. If you go to the trouble of killing somebody, the least you can do is be quiet about it afterward."

"I didn't kill him," Slater said wearily. "Don't try to act innocent with me of all people, Luis. But he was killed because of something I'd done for money, and all of a sudden that dough wasn't any good any more."

"How much did you give her?" the Camel sneered. "Half?"

"I wanted to give her the whole goddamn thing, but when I came right down to it, I couldn't. I didn't count it. I just pushed it in the mailbox. Maybe it wasn't even half."

"But this is weak, Paul. Very, very weak. Oh, I am quite sure you did it. It is too absurd to be a lie. But I do not think it would take an hour to leave some money in a fat lady's mailbox. No, I suggest that you felt generous to this creature because you knew you were about

to rob me of a matter of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

Powys stirred. The redhead looked at him quickly, and the Englishman made a face to show that the sum impressed him.

The Camel went on. "We are clearing the ground. Now this sudden midnight trip by chartered plane. Your mother is sick?"

His voice was thick with sarcasm, and Slater said defensively, "Maybe she's not so sick I couldn't have gone up tomorrow. But my wife's been putting pressure on me to straighten up. You've been putting pressure on me to take one more trip and make enough to retire. At the same time I've been getting the pressure from another source you may not know about. I haven't been getting much sleep lately, not that it matters. Martha is a good judge of character. She knew that if you people put on one ounce more of that pressure I'd break. And if that happened, if I took one more wrong dollar, she said she'd leave me. I've played around a little, sure, but I worship that kid, Luis."

"True love," Alvarez said. "I honor it. But please continue. You expected me to come to see you and urge you once again to be sensible and make some money. And you were afraid you would agree?"

"Well, hell," Slater said uncomfortably. "I know my limitations. So I thought this cable about Mother was a God-given opportunity."

"God-given," the Camel sneered, "but perhaps arranged by someone on earth, eh? I will tell you, Paul. It is no news to me that you have begun to shake and shiver. A little of this pressure you speak about, applied by policemen, and I have feared you would fall apart. When you are nervous, you make me nervous. It is I want you to go once more. I have been working

this one for a long time. And this knock on the head seems to me to fit, Paul. You have been thinking perhaps yes, perhaps no. When you decide at last, you do not choose the sensible, honest way, but the foolish, the dishonest. And why? You are angry at me for this so-called pressure. It will be the last time, you tell yourself, and never again, if you do it this way, will you have to make such an unpleasant decision."

"That's pretty cheap psychology. And it's wrong."

"This we will learn. Because of one thing I am certain. You will find out tonight what is meant by pressure, and I think you are right—you are not the type to stand up."

"No. No. But don't use any muscle on me, Luis. On me *or* my wife. At the same time I'm not a moron. When you pulled me off the plane and said you had Martha, you really jarred me. I would have done anything you said. But then I stopped to think. Consider a possibility, Luis. What if I didn't steal this dough? Just consider it, *that's all I ask. How can I convince you, by swearing on the Bible?* You probably don't even have a Bible. To you it's ABC. All I have to do is get up the dough. But I can't get it up if I don't have it, can I? So I knocked my few brains together. I know what you do with the people who double-cross you. Crrr!"

He made a choking sound, which he must have accompanied with a gesture, drawing his hand flat across his throat. "And if you killed me you'd have to kill Martha too, and I didn't want either of those things to happen. So this is the way I worked it. I wrote a letter. It'll be found in the morning unless I get it and tear it up in the meantime. And if I'm dead I can't very well tear it up."

"What is in this letter?"

"Why, the whole damn thing, Luis. Facts and figures. I know you think you can beat a smuggling rap, and

maybe you can. So I put in the dope on what happened to Albert Watts."

"That does not sound so menacing."

"You think so, do you? I know you covered yourself. You'd be careful about a thing like that. So what I said was that we did it together."

After a moment's silence the Camel's voice said softly, "My God, Paul."

"I knew it would impress you. I said you told me not to worry about the alibi. You could get plenty of people to swear we were somewhere else that night. But it won't stand up against a written confession, Luis. I described how we did it. I only drove the car, naturally. You used the knife."

"And you—signed this amazing document?"

"What good would it be without a signature? And I don't think it's bad, for something I thought up on the spur of the moment. If you let us go, you'll still be all right. But if the cops find me in a ditch with my throat cut, you know what they'll think. They'll think you killed me to keep me from confessing, not knowing I'd already written it out and signed it. If you didn't hang for one murder, you'd hang for the other."

Alvarez said in disbelief, "Dear God. What if somebody finds this letter before you get it?"

"They won't," Slater said with confidence. "And don't think you can follow me and pick me up again after I have it. I intend to cut your telephone wires and see that your cars won't start without some extensive repairs."

There was another moment's silence. Outside on the terrace, Shayne could feel the tension in the room. Then the Camel gave a muffled exclamation. There was the sound of a blow.

"You imbecile!" the Camel said. "I hope you don't

don't have to cut your throat. I will stop short of that. We will work slowly, so you will have time to appreciate everything fully. Then we will move on to your wife, to José's delight. You said you worship her, I believe? There will be little left to worship when he is finished."

"The letter—"

"But don't you understand, Paul? Where you have put this letter is merely one more of the things we must find out."

He raised his voice to summon the bartender. "All!"

CHAPTER 12

As Alvarez called, Michael Shayne moved his legs and nodded to Powys. Silently the Englishman began to wriggle backward. When they were around the corner, Shayne crawled across to the balustrade. Turning, he cautiously raised his head. Al had run in from the dining room. He was standing over Slater's chair, and Alvarez seemed to be tying Slater's hands.

Shayne and Powys quickly slid over the balustrade. Crouched low, they ran past the dining-room windows. Gaining the protection of the garage, they stopped for a low-voiced consultation.

"This becomes a bit more serious," Powys said.

"You're still with me?"

"Definitely. I want to get the Slaters aboard that plane as much as you do. How many men are we up against?"

"The Camel and Al in the living room. Two in the bedroom with Mrs. Slater, two more around the house somewhere. I don't think we need to count the cab driver. He's neutral."

Powys said lightly, "Three apiece. Take them in sequence. I think we can handle them."

"O.k. Start with the bedroom. I want the one on the bed."

They circled the house. The kitchen, as they passed, still seemed to be empty. They were careful crossing the lighted strip of turf and the terrace, but once inside there was no further need for caution. The cab driver had

don't have to cut your throat. I will stop short of that. We will work slowly, so you will have time to appreciate everything fully. Then we will move on to your wife, to José's delight. You said you worship her, I believe? There will be little left to worship when he is finished."

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"O.k. Start with the bedroom. I want the one on the bed."

They circled the house. The kitchen, as they passed, still seemed to be empty. They were careful crossing the lighted strip of turf and the terrace, but once inside there was no further need for caution. The cab driver had

turned up the radio to get the full driving effect of a Louis Armstrong solo. Powys followed Shayne quickly along a carpeted hall. The sharp pain in the redhead's chest was gone, but a dull ache remained, a reminder that he couldn't press an attack with his usual abandon.

He counted doors, remembering the layout of the wing as he had seen it from outside. He stopped and exchanged a look with Powys. The Englishman tapped his pipe against his heel and stuck it into his breast pocket.

Shayne turned the knob slowly, holding it in both hands. His shoulder muscles were knotted. When the knob was all the way around, freeing the latch, he drew back slightly and slammed his shoulder hard against the door. It came open violently. The man on the other side was hurled forward, and the chair fell on top of him.

Shayne left him to Powys. On the bed, José's face had gone blank with surprise. Martha, too, halfway between the bed and the door, had frozen as Shayne burst in. The redhead had to break stride to go around her, giving José the fraction of a second he needed. He scrambled up higher on the bed, but didn't have time to get out of a sitting position. As Shayne came around the bed he rolled forward and kicked out hard with his right foot.

The pointed toe of his shoe caught the detective in the side with stunning force. Six inches farther forward, and Shayne would have gone nowhere the rest of the night under his own power. He was probably unconscious for a moment. He fell, landing across the smaller man's body, and his fingers fastened in the front of José's coat. Momentum carried him across the bed. As he fell to the floor he dragged José with him.

His brain cleared in time to see that José had managed to take out a gun. This wasn't Martha's little automatic, but an ugly short-barreled revolver. Shayne grabbed for his arm, but he was rolling away, bringing the gun up

between them. Shayne let go of José's coat and batted him awkwardly across the head with his loosely clenched fist. It was more of a push than a blow, but it knocked the Latin's head back against the metal framework of the bed, dazing him for an instant.

In that instant Shayne recovered. He clamped a crushing grip on José's right wrist. José stabbed out at his eyes with his free hand, his fingers bunched and rigid, but Shayne jerked his head and the dangerous fingers passed harmlessly across his cheekbone. He had discovered that he couldn't lift his left arm. He increased the pressure with his right as José tried to get away. Straining against each other, they came to their feet slowly. José's face was contorted with effort. José managed to turn so Shayne was behind him. Shayne was putting forth his full strength to keep the small man from twisting his wrist upward.

No more than several seconds had elapsed. The fat-faced youth, who had been sitting tipped back against the door, now lay sprawled on his back, arms and legs outflung. He was unconscious, and it seemed to Shayne that his jaw was broken. Powys was sucking the knuckles of his left hand. He stooped swiftly and took a gun from somewhere inside the unconscious man's clothes. There were running footsteps outside in the corridor. Turning, Powys ran out, holding the gun behind his leg.

José squirmed, kicking back viciously at the detective's leg. Shayne was slowly forcing his adversary in against the bed, smothering him with his superior weight and size. But his left arm still dangled uselessly.

"Michael, you're hurt!" Martha cried.

"Get back," Shayne grated through his clenched teeth.

Martha looked desperately for something to use as a weapon. José spat out something in Spanish. In the next bedroom, the Louis Armstrong record came to a blazing

climax, and an American with a Georgia accent began telling his listeners how easy it was to borrow money from the friendly finance company that was sponsoring the program. Sweat poured down Shayne's face, and his hand began to slip.

A man appeared in the bedroom doorway—Pedro, José's brother. He looked stupidly at the scene, and it took him a moment to understand the meaning of what he saw: Michael Shayne, left bound and gagged behind the Half Moon for the police, no longer behind the Half Moon or in jail, but struggling with José for a gun. He started forward, shouting, and at that same instant Shayne's hand slipped on José's wrist; the gun came up and fired.

Shayne chopped at José's head with his right. He was able to put a little beef behind this blow, and it caught the small man on the ear and sent him sprawling. Shayne stamped at the gun. He missed. He tried again, moving quickly, and his foot came down hard on José's hand. José's finger was still curled around the trigger guard. He screamed as the finger broke. He had one knee beneath him, trying to rise. Martha ran across the room, lifting a lamp over her head. She brought it down. It shattered over his shoulders; the heavy bronze base caught the top of his head and he went over sideward.

Shayne kicked the gun out of his hand. He whirled, crouching. José's brother was still standing in the middle of the room. The stupid look was back on his face and he clutched his breast with both hands. Before Shayne could reach him his knees sagged and he folded forward. His coat came open, and Shayne saw the red stain on his shirt.

Martha's hands were over her eyes. She was trembling violently. Shayne strode up to her and took her by the shoulders. She looked at him, her eyes wide with shock.

"Michael, I'm going to faint."

"The hell you are," he said roughly. "You're going to stay on your feet and get their guns. Toss them over the embankment. Then clear out." He thrust a set of car keys at her. "If we aren't out in five minutes, go down the road and call Vivienne."

"Who?" she said.

"Vivienne. And then get some cops out here. Have you got it?"

She shook her head. "I can't leave Paul."

"Goddamn it!" Shayne shouted. "Do what I tell you!"

She shook her head again, returning his look firmly. Her eyes had cleared. Shayne could see that she meant to stay, no matter what he said to her. He put the keys back in his pocket, snatched up José's revolver, and ran out of the bedroom.

He had put both hands on her shoulders, he remembered, so his left arm must be working again. He tried it. He could bend the elbow, but couldn't bring it out from his side.

The cab driver had heard the shot, and was looking out cautiously. Shayne gave him one look, his lips peeled back from his teeth. The cigar dropped from the man's mouth. He popped back into the bedroom and slammed the door.

Shayne ran into the dining room as Al came through the folding doors at the opposite end. Al had his big gun up, but he didn't fire. Shayne stopped. For a long moment the two men looked at each other. The revolver was pointed at Al's feet. Al's gun was pointed over Shayne's head.

"You want to watch what you do from now on," the redhead said quietly. "You don't want to wind up as the guy who takes the fall for these bastards."

He began to walk forward slowly. The cards were

still laid out at the end of the table. Al was planted solidly in front of the doorway, looking as though it would take a bulldozer to move him.

Shayne said, "It's a Mexican stand-off. You haven't been playing solitaire. You heard what they've been saying. They've got each other sewed up. The Camel's connections don't stretch as far as murder. When he goes, the rest of his people go with him, and that includes you, Al. Don't forget you're a foreigner here. You won't get any help from the American consul."

Confused sounds came from beyond the folding door. The volume on the cab driver's radio was still up very high but the music was now cool jazz, played by a small group of calm musicians.

"You were in on a kidnaping," Shayne went on, still walking forward. "It wasn't handled too well. Too many people in on it—very sloppy. If you think back, you'll remember that the cops had me for a while, and I gave them all the names."

Al slowly lowered the heavy gun until it was pointed at Shayne's chest. Shayne kept the revolver aimed at the floor.

"I'm out of my own territory down here," he said, several steps away from Al. "But if I get killed there's going to be a certain amount of heat. The Camel must have something on you to make you wear that ring in your ear. The hell with that. He'll have to have somebody to turn over, and you're the number one prospect. Leave Alvarez to me. I'll get him out of your hair."

He shifted the revolver to his left hand. As he came up to Al he reached out slowly, moving with care, and took Al's gun out of his hand. The tension went out of the bartender's body all at once. He seemed sure of himself again. Shifting his weight, he hit Shayne on the side of the jaw.

Shayne rocked back on his heels. He grinned savagely,

dropping the guns. Stepping back, he picked up a chair and whirled it at Al. It broke against Al's upstretched arms. Shayne drove in behind it and nailed Al with a high right to the head. A left in the right spot now would have finished him, but the detective's left arm was still dead.

He tried to drop back into hitting position; with only one arm in motion, Shayne was badly off-balance, and he fell forward, knocking Al into the folding door. Two sections of the door folded shut on him. As he freed himself, it banged open all the way. Slater and the Camel, Shayne saw, were rolling across the living-room rug.

Al came at Shayne, both hands up. Luckily he wasn't a body-puncher. He threw a right and a left at Shayne's head. Shayne slipped them both, and at that instant he had a sensation as though something had torn in his shoulder, and his left arm came up. He still couldn't hit with it, but it put him back in balance and he could shield his ribs. Al caught him with a straight overhand. It helped Shayne set himself. He saw another punch starting, and he beat it in. Al's punch landed, but with nothing behind it. Shayne hit him twice more. This was crude slugging, with no attempt at style. If either punch had missed, the redhead would have been wide open. But they didn't miss. Al was already on the way down when Shayne hit him in the same spot a second time, with his weight behind it. One of Al's arms, swinging, swept the cards off the table. He was unconscious before he hit the floor.

Shayne staggered. He felt the corner of the table against his hip.

Paul Slater had Alvarez by the throat and was knocking his head repeatedly against the floor. Slater was no longer the handsome, somewhat spoiled-looking young man Shayne had glimpsed from the terrace; his face was suffused with blood, his eyes protruded, and he was out

of control. Alvarez flopped around helplessly, clawing at Slater's wrists. A curious sound came from deep in his throat. Shayne knew that unless he did something to stop it, in another thirty seconds or less Alvarez would be dead. But a terrible weariness had come over him. He couldn't move.

Cecil Powys ran in from the terrace, a gun in his hand. He glanced at the struggling pair on the floor. Without an instant's pause he chopped at Slater's wrists with the gun. Slater cried out. Powys hit him again, and his fingers opened. Alvarez fell away from him, clutching his throat.

"On your feet, Paul," Powys said. "Your wife is still here."

"Oh, my God," Slater said thickly.

Alvarez croaked something and plunged upward at Slater, butting him in the chest.

"Gentlemen," Powys said impatiently.

He dropped the gun into his side pocket. He pulled the Camel around with one hand and hit him with the other. It had been a long time since Shayne had seen anyone punch like that. The blow was delivered seemingly without effort, but Alvarez pitched forward as though he had been hit with a hammer.

Slater scrambled to his feet. "Where is she?"

A bell rang loudly in another part of the house. The strange lethargy fell away from Shayne. He whipped around. The bell went on ringing, a harsh and urgent summons. Someone must have opened the gate at the foot of the drive. He shouted to Powys and headed back through the dining room.

José was in the kitchen, standing confusedly with his face streaming with blood. He had made it this far, but he wasn't going much farther. His eyes were glazed. He swayed forward and fell toward Shayne. He was holding a large carving knife in front of him.

"Watch it, Mikel!" Powys cried behind him.

The redhead sidestepped, and José fell through the doorway. As he went down he pulled over a table and a lamp crashed to the floor. There was a sudden brilliant flash, and the house was plunged into darkness. The bell stopped ringing. The music was cut off abruptly in the middle of a note.

In the sudden silence, Shayne heard a car's motor. He ran to the kitchen door.

"Martha!"

He heard Powys behind him: "Let's get out of this place, Mike. That's Sergeant Brannon or I miss my guess."

Shayne groped his way outside. A moment later he was across the terrace and down the steps. He felt gravel beneath his feet, then grass. He could see the headlights now, coming fast. There were sounds of movement behind him. He called Martha's name again. A shot was fired inside the house, then another.

"Off in the grass," Powys called. "Keep together."

Shayne could make out a blur of movement on the other side of the drive. Three more shots sounded. He heard a woman's voice.

"Martha?"

"Yes, over here," her voice answered.

"Is Slater with you?"

Hearing the American grunt in reply, Shayne concentrated on getting the little group as far as possible from the house before the car reached them.

"Now get down," he snapped. "All of you. Down."

They fell to the grass as the headlights swept by. Shayne saw that the driver was wearing a police uniform. When the car was past, they ran for the gate, keeping to the grass that bordered the gravel. At the gate Shayne looked back. The police car's headlights illuminated one side of the house. There was another fusillade of shots.

The gate had been left open. Slater had apparently been hurt in the fight with the Camel. He lagged behind the others, his breath coming in great gasps. Outside the gate, he fell.

"Powys, go on ahead and get the car ready," Shayne said. "Take it easy, Paul. Plenty of time."

"I—" Slater gasped.

"Darling, it's all right now," Martha said beside him. "It's going to be really all right."

Shayne lifted him from one side, Martha from the other. For a moment the shooting had stopped, and Shayne heard a stentorian voice, unmistakably Sergeant Brannon's, bellowing a command. More shots followed.

The Morris was cleared by the time they reached it.

"Give me a hand, Mike," Powys said. "We can roll it out without starting the motor. Vivienne? Steer it for us, that's a good girl."

Shayne forced his way into the underbrush and gripped the rear bumper. Powys, on the other side, counted to three and they lifted and heaved forward. The little car hung for a moment, caught on a broken sapling, then rolled into the road.

"All right, everybody," Powys said. "Pile in. Going to be a squeeze."

Shayne tipped up the driver's seat so Paul and Martha could get in back. He ducked his head to go in after them.

"Paul?" Vivienne said in a small voice.

"Hello, Vivienne."

Martha looked from Paul to the girl and turned her head, biting her lip. Powys leaped in and released the emergency. The little car began to roll.

"Keep an eye out back, will you, Mike?" he said.

As soon as they passed around a bend, he turned on the parking lights. The car rolled more rapidly. He put

it in second and turned on the ignition; the motor started smoothly.

"I didn't introduce you people," Shayne said. "That's Cecil Powys at the wheel. Mrs. Slater, Miss Vivienne Larousse. I mean mademoiselle—or however the hell you pronounce it. You can thank Vivienne for getting us out here. We couldn't have found the place without her."

Martha hesitated. "We are grateful," she said quietly.

"So much shooting!" Vivienne exclaimed. "When I heard that I was sure you would all be shot full of holes. Mon Dieu, how I suffered. Michael, were those policemen?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "I guess Brannon took my advice and found himself a pigeon."

Powys said, "Rummage around in the dashboard compartment there, Vivienne. I need a map. I think there's a short way to the airdrome without going around through St. Albans."

Vivienne snapped on the dome light. In a moment she found a travel folder which included a road map of the island. Powys waited till they reached the main east-west road, then stopped to study the map.

"I thought so," he said after a moment. "I wish now we'd pulled out the phone back there. I intended to, but I forgot about it, what with one thing and another."

"Alvarez won't be doing any phoning," Shayne said. "If he can talk at all after that left you gave him, he'll be explaining things to Brannon."

"Hope you're right," the Englishman said. "I'd hate to get through all this and then find the beggars waiting for us."

"Wait!" Martha said suddenly as he reached back to turn off the light. "Paul!"

The intensity in Martha's tone lifted the Englishman's foot off the accelerator. Even Slater's lips were pale,

Shayne saw as he turned toward him. There were great drops of sweat on his forehead. He tried to smile, but only succeeded in exposing his lips in a terrible grimace. He had one hand inside his coat.

"Are you hit, Slater?" Shayne said.

Slater shook his head shortly. "Fine. Go on."

Shayne opened his coat and gently pulled his hand away from his stomach. With a sigh, Vivienne slid down in the front seat.

"Damn lucky shooting," Slater said weakly. "Black as pitch."

"Is it bad, Michael?" Martha asked quietly.

He looked at her. "Bad enough. I'll need something to use for a bandage."

"Yes."

Lifting herself, she pulled off her half-slip. Shayne ripped it in two and passed it around Slater's body, frowning as his hand touched the warmth and dampness in the small of Slater's back.

"We have to get him to a hospital," Martha said, watching Shayne's face. "Quickly."

Slater shook his head. "Airport first. Get you on the plane. I'll be all right."

Shayne completed the makeshift bandage. It would slow up the bleeding, possibly even stop it. But he knew that there wasn't anything he or anyone could do for Paul Slater now. He had seen too many gunshot wounds, and he had seen the look in Slater's eyes.

Powys threw the car into gear and it shot forward. "Make it just as fast going past the airport. What do you think, Mike? Put him on the plane?"

"No," Shayne said. "He's going to need transfusions."

"Put Martha on," Slater said. "Get out of this, darling."

"Don't be silly," she said sharply. "How can you think I could go away and leave you when—"

He interrupted. "Shayne," he said, his voice becoming stronger. "I know all about you. Oh, yes. When you were in the papers, Martha cut it out and kept it. Jealous. Funny? You're the kind of man she should have married. Not me, poor old Paul. Nothing I did amounted to a damn. Couldn't even be a halfway decent crook. Ashamed. Put her on the plane. I don't want her. Tell her to go, she'll go. Stay, all kinds of trouble. *All my fault!*"

Martha was crying helplessly. "Paul. Don't say those things. I won't go, you know I won't go."

"You will," Slater said. "Shayne, make her. Won't be alone. Vivienne. My type, Vivienne. I don't mean it? I mean it. Never loved you, Martha. Admired you. Different. She wasn't the first I ran away to. Last of a long line. If I married her, I'd be a better crook, better everything. You and I. Oil and water."

"Can't you go any faster?" Martha called to Powys.

"Don't know the road," Powys said grimly around his pipe. "We're making pretty good time."

The Morris rocketed around a curve, the outer wheels leaving the hardtop, and Slater said fiercely, "Hear me, Shayne? Make her. If she stays, the Camel—kill her." A spasm of pain shook him. "Bastard thinks I robbed him. Thinks I passed it to Martha. Danger." He gasped, "He'll kill her. The truth."

Powys took another long curve without slackening speed, and settled down for a straightaway.

"There's something in what he says. I'll take good care of him. If you stay, Mrs. Slater, the Camel's organization will be after you again. I think we can stave them off, but Paul will worry about it, and that's the worst possible thing for him to do. He'll be easier in his mind if you take that plane. —The turn's along here somewhere. Watch for it."

After a moment he continued "And as for you, Mike

you don't want to let the sergeant get his hands on you again. It's going to cost a little something. Do you have any cash?"

"A few hundred pounds."

"That should swing it."

Shayne was still frowning. Both Powys and Slater must know as well as he did that Martha no longer had anything to fear from Alvarez. He and his men would be in jail—if for nothing else, for shooting at Sergeant Brannon. A performance was being put on for somebody's benefit here. But whose?

The Morris was eating up the road. Slater lay with his head against Martha's breast. Her arms were around him.

"I love you, Paul," she said through stiff lips. "Don't be badly hurt. I couldn't live without you."

She was crying silently. In front, Vivienne sat up with a start as the little car screamed around another unbanked curve. She turned to look at Slater, her face frightened. Slater's eyes were closed. His head shifted on Martha's breast with the motion of the car. Shayne thought he was unconscious, but when the lights of the airport could be seen ahead and Powys slowed for the turn, Slater's eyes opened.

"Not much we can do if the blighters telephoned," Powys said. "Let's be sure we're in agreement. Mrs. Slater?"

"No. No. How can you imagine I could—"

"Stop that!" Slater said. "Settled. Shayne, carry her if you have to. I'm—" He paused, gathering his strength. "I'm through. You—never respected me. Too late for argument. Do what I say. Better long ago if I gave you orders. Wife obey husband. Supposed to. *I understand, Martha.* My fault. Lousy husband."

"We will look after him," Vivienne said. "They are

right, you should hurry. Paul must get to the hospital very quickly."

And that made it unanimous, Shayne thought.

"I'm sorry about everything, darling," Martha said hopelessly. "Paul, please. If you tell me I must—"

She was sobbing uncontrollably as Powys made the turn.

CHAPTER 13

Late the following afternoon in Miami, Michael Shayne knotted his necktie in front of a mirror in the office of Dr. Benjamin Sanborn, the elderly orthopedic surgeon who patched him up whenever some misadventure of Shayne's made it necessary. Dr. Sanborn tossed a set of X-rays onto his desk.

"You were lucky, Mike. When I let you out of the hospital I told you to relax. To keep out of trouble. Not to put any strain on your chest muscles. I think I remember advising you to close your office and go on a vacation."

Shayne grinned at his reflection in the mirror. "No sermons, Doc. What's the verdict?"

"From the marks on your face, from the skin that seems to be missing on the back of your right hand, I have a pretty good idea how you picked up these latest injuries. It wasn't an auto accident this time. It was a fight. One of these days they'll bring you in with something I can't repair. And don't think it's going to make me unhappy! I don't think I ever had a patient as deliberately unco-operative as you. What do you want me to do, put you in a strait-jacket or keep you under sedation till those bones have a chance to knit?"

He threw up his hands. Then he said gruffly, "There's no new fracture. Your guardian angel was looking out for you, it seems. There's been a slight splintering of one of the bone-ends, but I think the new tape will hold you together. Now please, Mike. Take it easy. Take a vaca-

tion. I don't want the job of pulling bone splinters out of one of your lungs. Now will you get out of here?"

"Gladly," Shayne said, walking to the door. "Thanks for the grease job."

"And don't come back!" Dr. Sanborn shouted.

Jack Malloy, the customs agent, was outside in the waiting room. He closed a magazine as Shayne came out, and stood up.

"I thought I'd find you here, Mike," he said. "What's bothering old sourpuss?"

"He thinks I ought to take a vacation," Shayne said, grinning.

"I'm driving down to the office, Mike. Mind coming along?"

"If it doesn't take more than half an hour. I'm picking up Martha Slater for dinner."

Malloy gave him a peculiar look, and Shayne said, "What's the matter, hear anything about Slater?"

They went out of the waiting room, and Malloy punched for the down elevator. "He's dead, Mike. He went out around noon. He was only conscious for a few minutes after he made the hospital."

"Well, I had it figured," Shayne said heavily. "Did he do any talking?"

"A little, all pretty wild. The police stenographer got some of it. A French girl, Vivienne something-or-other, was with him right through."

Shayne rubbed his forehead. "I'll have to break it to Martha. It's going to be rough."

The elevator was crowded, and they didn't speak again until they were outside in Malloy's official Chevy.

Shayne said, "How about that welcoming committee at the airport this morning? Who told you we were coming?"

"We have our sources," Malloy said vaguely, wheeling

"Hell, Jack," Shayne said irritably. "I know what Slater told Alvarez about it, and I'll pass it on to Brannon. Those boys were trying to out-guess each other, and how much truth there was in it, I don't know."

They rode up rapidly in the elevator, and Shayne followed the customs agent to a door marked *U. S. Treasury, Customs Division*. Malloy had to use his key; it was 5:30, after civil service hours. He had a pleasant corner office looking out on the river.

The first thing he did was take a bottle of cognac and two glasses out of a file.

"You expected me," Shayne said.

"Hell, I'm getting to like the stuff."

Shayne sat down at one end of a leather sofa. Malloy splashed cognac into the two glasses and handed one of them to Shayne. Pushing papers aside, he perched on the desk.

"I've been brooding about this all afternoon, Mike, and it still doesn't make sense. Here's something else I picked up from Sergeant Brannon on the phone. He found a dummy attic in the Alvarez nightclub—"

"I told him about it," Shayne said, drinking.

"He didn't mention that," Malloy said. "I've got the feeling that if you ever go back to St. Louis without an honor guard of U. S. Marines, he's going to put your hide to the barn door. Well, he was over the top and found one interesting thing—a little stack of tissue paper. It may not mean anything the way diamond dealers usually use it. You had a chance to ask Mike. What do you think? He's got Alvarez with the money to do with the goddam thing, which means he's got to plant the seed."

"There's more of the same. You can have it—I made two copies. I'm surprised he did even that much talking with three .38 holes in him."

Shayne looked up. He said sharply, "Say that again. Three .38 holes?"

"So Brannon said. Only one of the slugs was still inside." He added: "But don't worry about breaking the news to Martha."

Shayne's voice was dangerously soft. "What do you mean by that?"

"Where were you going to pick her up, at her hotel?" Malloy said, watching him. "She won't be there."

The redhead could feel his stomach tightening. His mouth was dry. "You had a tail on her."

"Hell, yes, Mike. Standard procedure. Two radio cars and four old pros. I wasn't hoping for much, because if she was trying to pull something she wouldn't be likely to do it the first day. And she slipped us."

"You're sure your boys didn't mess it up?"

"Not these boys. She knew they were behind her, and she dumped them. Did a nice professional job of it. She hasn't been back to her hotel. I've got a watch on terminals and airports, but it isn't quite big enough for roadblocks. I don't really expect to see Martha Slater again."

Shayne reached for the cognac. He was feeling completely relaxed for the first time since he went bonefishing on St. Albans.

"Get through to Sergeant Brannon," he said. "Find out if Paul Slater had a cable in his pocket when they brought him in."

Malloy turned over the pages in the folder. "I got an inventory this afternoon. Yeah, a cable saying his mother was seriously ill, to come home at once. What's that prove? We know it's a fake, to give him a pretext for

out after fifteen minutes, headed south on Miami Avenue and found the address he was looking for.

It was on Bird Road in South Miami, a large stucco house with a considerable expanse of lawn. Shayne drove around the block. Returning, he found a parking space from which he could watch the house. He lit a cigarette and settled down to wait.

CHAPTER 14

At 6:30 a man crossed the open breezeway leading to the garage from the house and backed out a Pontiac station wagon. Forty-five minutes later he returned, bringing a well-dressed, healthy-looking woman, a boy and a girl in their early teens, and a great deal of luggage. The Pontiac was unloaded and put away. At eight a Mercury sedan drove into the driveway and a man and a woman went into the house. They were greeted enthusiastically in the doorway. A little over two hours later, Shayne ran out of cigarettes. Ten minutes later the couple left. Lights began going out.

Michael Shayne leaned forward hugging the steering wheel, his eyes hooded and wary. He had done a lot of this type of waiting in his career, and he would undoubtedly do a lot more. It didn't bother him.

When the last light in the house went out, Shayne slipped lower in the seat. He had parked in a spot between streetlights, in the shadow of a leafy sycamore. At ten minutes after midnight, a woman approached on the opposite sidewalk. She was wearing ankle-length slacks and low-heeled shoes. It was Martha Slater. She glanced at the house Shayne was watching and passed on, going around the next corner.

He left the car. Crossing the street, he crouched on one knee among the low-growing shrubbery at the foot of the lawn. He parted the shrubbery carefully and watched the house and the garage. After fifteen minutes he saw a flicker of movement in the breezeway. For just

an instant he saw a woman's figure. She came out a moment later wheeling a bicycle.

Instead of coming straight down the driveway, she headed across the lawn at an angle. Shayne would have to leave cover to intercept her. He kept behind the shrubbery as long as he could, but as he was crossing the drive she turned and saw him.

He set off toward her at a hard run. She wrenched the bike around, leaped into the saddle and shot rapidly down the sloping lawn. Shayne could see that he had no hope of cutting her off. He whirled and raced back to his car. Martha, peddling hard, bumped over the curb and was around the corner by the time he had the motor started. He roared into the nearest driveway, cramping the wheels viciously, reversed and came back. He reversed again and the powerful car leaped forward.

He turned the corner on the edges of his tires. For a moment he thought he had lost her. Then he saw a flash of movement between two stone gates into the University of Miami campus. Shayne swung the wheel hard. He knew she could get away from him among the university buildings, where he couldn't follow in the Buick. Instead of turning through the gates he went past and made the turn on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Again he was afraid it was a bad guess, and he began to slow down. Something glinted at him in the rear-view mirror; it was gone when he turned around, but he made a sweeping U-turn at the next intersection and came back with the gas pedal on the floor. Ahead, the bike shot through a red light and hurtled into the southbound traffic on Miami Avenue.

A horn sounded a long desperate warning. There was a shriek of locked wheels. Martha, on the bike, was trying to cut diagonally across the lanes. An open convertible swerved to avoid her. An opening appeared. She almost slipped through, but the car behind her was trav-

cling too fast; it touched her rear fender and she went out of control. Lights flashed. Brakes and horns sounded at the same second. She disappeared from Shayne's view. There was a long skid, a sickening crunch of metal.

The light changed, and Shayne came down hard on the gas. On the other side of the intersection he swung in toward the sidewalk, his wheels riding over the curb. He snapped off the ignition and leaped out.

He saw the bicycle first. It was a boy's English bike, brand new, with the brakes on the handlebars. The front wheel was squashed flat, the center bar bent into the shape of an L. It had been hurled almost across the sidewalk, but Martha lay on the curb, her head and shoulders on the sidewalk, the rest of her body on the road.

The light changed, but the northbound traffic couldn't move; a panel truck had slued as the brakes took hold, and now blocked both lanes. The driver, a pale young man in a sports shirt, ran toward Martha. He and Shayne reached her almost together.

"She shot right out in front of me!" he cried. "How could I—"

Shayne knelt beside the girl. Her body was twisted at a terrible angle. "I don't feel anything at all," she said wonderingly. "Mike. I knew you'd find out. I didn't dare wait. I thought I'd still have a chance if I could get away tonight."

"Don't touch her!" Shayne said roughly as the truck driver stooped to lift her onto the sidewalk. "Call an ambulance. The V.A. hospital's nearest. Then call police emergency. Get moving."

"How did you know I would come here?" Martha said.

"It wasn't too hard to figure," Shayne said. "The P & O had a cruise ship coming in tonight that touched at St. Albans this morning. I got a list of the passengers who went aboard at St. Albans, with their baggage declara-

tions. These people were the only ones who brought back an English bicycle. You'd better not talk."

"I want to. The strange thing is that I have no feeling anywhere at all. That means it's serious, doesn't it?"

"We'll see when the ambulance gets here."

"Has there been any news about Paul?"

"He's dead."

A spasm of pain twisted her face. "How horrible."

Shayne looked down at her and said gently, "But if you were going to feel bad about it, you shouldn't have shot him."

Her eyes widened. "Michael, you know me! You know—"

"I'm beginning to think I don't know you very well. There was a lot of wild shooting last night. One of those stray shots might have pinked any one of us. But not three shots in a row. I told you to throw away the guns, but you kept one of them, didn't you? When the lights went out you called for your husband. He answered you. You took his hand, put the gun against his stomach and shot him three times."

She turned her face away. "How can you think such a horrible thing?"

"Come on, Martha. Stop acting. What's in the bike frame?"

"Diamonds. That doesn't mean—"

Shayne looked up. A circle of people was standing around them. One was a cop whose face looked vaguely familiar.

"Anything I can do, Mike? The ambulance call is in."

"Better clear the lane so it can get in against the curb."

"Michael," Martha said in a low voice, "talk to me about it. You owe me that much. The pain will be too bad later. I have to make plans."

"I don't owe you anything except one pound," he said.

Reaching out, she found his hand. "Michael. I knew about the diamonds, but that's absolutely all."

"The hell it is, Martha. Paul didn't make those arrangements last night. You did. You knew about the trick with the radio programs. You made the appointment with Alvarez. You arranged with someone up here to send the cable about Paul's mother. You talked him into chartering the plane. And if he'd actually taken off, it would have worked. It was a pretty good try. You only missed by thirty seconds."

She threw her head from side to side, keeping a desperate hold on his hand.

He said, "The cable was in his pocket when they brought him in. He wouldn't have to send a cable to himself—he didn't show it to anybody."

"Damn you, Michael. The minute you came into that room I knew it was over. I have to know. Why do you think I would shoot Paul?"

"The minute Alvarez told him how the appointment had been made, he knew who made it. He probably guessed that the cable was a phony. He wouldn't have the guts to pull a trick like that himself, but he was willing to cover up for you, and divide the profits. And it wasn't part of your plan to divide with anybody. And there were other things. He thought he was the one who started the smuggling. I doubt it. I think it was your idea, and like a good wife you persuaded him that he'd thought of it first. Of course he was the one who'd go to jail if anything slipped. He wasn't the world's biggest brain, but in time he would have figured it out. You didn't want that, because he might figure out at the same time that you're the one who put the knife in Albert Watts."

"Michael. Stop."

"I'd just as soon stop. This wasn't my idea."

"No, no, I have to know what you think. But it's insane!"

"Look at it one way," Shayne said, "and every murderer's insane. Paul thought it was Alvarez or one of his people who killed Watts. Alvarez thought it was Paul. They both had the same reason. It was a good one, but yours was better. Because why didn't Watts give information against you as well as Paul?"

She frowned.

Shayne went on, "You were the link, Martha. I've had since six tonight to work it out, and I think I've got it. Neither Paul nor you did any actual handling. You planted the stuff on people who didn't know you existed. This afternoon Malloy reminded me that after the Camel was slugged I didn't hear a car. Whoever did it must have got away on a bicycle. And it dawned on me. Everybody on St. Albans rides bicycles. The tourists rent them. Some of them take one of them home, if they've got any of their five hundred dollars left. I don't know if they get as good a break on the price as on jewelry or liquor—"

"Just about," she said tonelessly.

"All you had to do was find out who'd bought a bicycle to ship home, and borrow it for a few hours. That would be easy. Nobody locks up bicycles down there. You take off the handlebars and drop the little packages in the hollow frame. You put the bike back where you got it. A month later, or six months later, after the tourist is back in the States with all his wonderful bargains, you borrow the bike again. You take out the packages and have it back before the owner knows it's missing. And there's never any connection between you and Paul and the people who carry the stuff in for you. You keep to tourists who live in southern Florida, which is also easy because if they live farther away they don't

take a bicycle home. It's a clumsy thing to carry in a car."

"You should have been a criminal," she said bitterly.

"Watts handled baggage at the agency," Shayne went on. "He'd know who bought what, and when they were leaving. Paul tried Vivienne on him first. She scared him. But you wouldn't scare him, Martha. Did you pay him with money or something else? Hell, maybe you didn't have to pay him at all. But he found what was going on. He didn't denounce you both, just Paul. I think he saw Paul in jail for a long term, and Albert Watts and Paul's wife on some other Caribbean island spending those nice thousand-dollar bills. A dreamer, in short. But that was his dream, not yours. You couldn't afford to have him alive with the big one coming up."

A siren began rising and falling in the distance.

"I was across the island when he was killed," she said.

"No, I don't think so, Martha. He gave his wife a long excuse about why he wouldn't be home for dinner, the kind of elaborate excuse a married man uses when he has a date with another girl. You were driving a rented car. You probably did some business on the other side of the island, counting on the natives to be vague about the time if anybody ever asked them. Watts walked out of town to some lonely spot, where you picked him up after dark. You did some hard drinking together, and he probably did some more dreaming. On the way back to town, you pulled off the road for one last kiss. You stabbed him three times, the same number of bullets you put in Paul. You took his wallet, to make it look like a robbery, and pushed him out in the native quarter. You knew the natives wouldn't come out to help a white man with his well known views on the subject of natives. He bled to death."

"Nobody else thinks—"

"Martha, he'd denounced a smuggler, and the man

had reappeared on the island. At a time like that he wouldn't go drinking in native bars. He wouldn't be alone with anyone he didn't trust."

"Is that all?"

"I think it's about all."

The siren was coming rapidly nearer. Martha said, "Then it's not very much. I'm going to fight it. I won't give you an inch."

Her face was suddenly distorted with pain. The cords stood out on her neck and her grip on Shayne's hand tightened.

"It's beginning," she whispered. After an instant she went on, "Well, did you expect me to say I'm sorry? All you have is a theory. You'll have your hands full convicting me of smuggling. And as for murder—"

"You hired me to find out who killed Watts," Shayne said wearily. "With your husband, you used somebody else's gun, and you're probably in the clear. But I think they'll pin Watts on you. They don't need much. Just someone who saw you together once, someone who saw him being pushed out of the car. A little blood on the seat would do it. There's a lot of blood in a stabbing. Maybe his raincoat didn't catch it all."

She turned her head to look at him as the ambulance pulled up at the curb.

"You must hate me, Michael."

"Maybe just a little," Shayne said.

Two interns jumped out of the ambulance with a stretcher. Shayne remained at the girl's side.

"You had your full quota of luck with Slater," he said. "He knew you shot him, but he wanted you to take the plane and get away with the diamonds, because he thought it was his fault. He thought he started the smuggling, and turned you into the kind of person who would kill her husband for money, because he'd made money seem that important to you. When I think of that, I'm a

little sick. And I've suddenly started wondering about the first time you became a widow. Everybody thought Fred Baines was shot by a jewel thief. The guy always claimed he was innocent. I'm going to have another look at that case."

She stared at him. "You monster! Damn you, damn you. I didn't!" she cried as the pain began again. "I had to kill Watts and Paul. You don't understand. After I started I had to go through with it, wherever it led. But not Fred. I loved him! He was the only man—"

Shayne stood up. One of the interns had a hypodermic syringe. Shayne watched bleakly as the needle went in. Slowly and painstakingly, the interns worked the stretcher beneath her body.

"I didn't!" she sobbed. "You horrible, horrible—"

Her voice died, and with a sigh she went under. As one of the interns went past him, Shayne gave him a questioning look. The intern shook his head.

"Not a chance."

They slid the stretcher into the ambulance. As the ambulance moved off, its siren howling, Malloy's Chevy pulled into the space it left vacant.

"I thought that would be you, Mike," he said, coming out. "I've been listening to the trouble on short wave."

Shayne was looking after the departing ambulance, his face drained of expression.

"Martha?" Malloy said.

"Yeah," Shayne said heavily, and with an effort he turned toward the smashed bike. "Diamonds. In the frame."

"Well, well," Malloy exclaimed. "I knew you'd come through for me with that much dough involved, Mike."

"What?" Shayne said, and then he thrust his head forward. In an instant he had thrown off his depression. Everything seemed in much sharper focus. "Open it up,

Jack. Twenty-five percent of a hundred and twenty grand—"

Malloy said suspiciously, "Where'd you get that figure?"

"Alvarez said that's how much he lost when he was slugged."

"That's wholesale. We'll put it up at auction and get pretty close to the market price. It should run a quarter of a million or better, if he figured it at a hundred and twenty." He went to pick up the bike. "But I might as well tell you. You're only getting half."

"What do you mean, half? I did all the work. They were shooting at me, not you."

"I'm not talking about me. I'll go on drawing my modest salary for another twenty years, when I'll become eligible for a modest pension. But there's a character named Powys—"

"Powys!" Shayne said. "The guy who claimed he was working on a Ph.D.?"

"Doctors in anthropology get even less than people who work for the U.S. government, I understand. It could be that he was also having himself a good time, but this twenty-five G's will come in handy."

"Good God!" Shayne said, clapping his thighs as many things suddenly became clear to him. "He must have thought I actually was a hoodlum."

"He saw your face on a *Wanted* flier. What else would he think? There's one thing wrong with our way of paying for information—when one of our tipsters gets wind of a shipment, he wants it to go through so he can take his percentage of the seizure. Powys didn't want you arrested. He wanted you and the Slaters to get away. The moment your plane took off he cabled me."

"You didn't find anything on the plane," Shayne said. "So how does he come in for half?"

"This is a one-shot with you, Mike. If Alvarez beats this murder charge, and I have a hunch he will, he's going to start operating again. And Powys is still on the scene. I want to keep him happy."

Shayne looked at him for a moment, somewhat groggily. Then he pulled himself together.

"I can't stand here arguing. Sergeant Brannon or n Sergeant Brannon, I've got to get back to St. Albans."

"Why?" Malloy said, surprised.

"You forget I'm on vacation. I have to send postcard; get a sunburn and do some shopping. And then come in at the International Airport on the right plane so my secretary can meet me. If she knew I'd come home ahead of time she'd wring my neck."

"Mike, you can't mean—"

"That's exactly what I do mean," Shayne said grimly. But life, as Shayne had known for years, is full of surprises. There were almost a million people in greater Miami. The odds that Lucy Hamilton would be passing that spot on Miami Avenue in a taxi at exactly that moment were rather long. For one thing, she only came into that part of town once or twice a year. For another when Shayne was out of town she usually went to bed earlier than this. But as it happened, she had had dinner with friends nearby, and had been listening to records all evening, and was now on her way home. She called out sharply to her driver. When he came to a stop in front of Malloy's Chevy she leaned out the window.

"Michael Shayne, *what are you doing in Miami?*"

Neither Malloy nor Shayne could answer. They were laughing too hard.

